

Community Collaboration Work Group
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 7, 2012; 7:30 a.m.
Room 310 - County Administration Building

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Jim Saalfeld; Vice-Chair City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss; County Commissioners Carol Hennessy, Dan Koorndyk and Mike Wawee Jr.; President of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Rick Baker; Grand Rapids Township Supervisor Mike DeVries; President & CEO of The Right Place Inc. Birgit Klohs; Professor of Economics Paul Isely; Walker City Manager Cathy Vander Meulen; Attorney Jim Brown

MEMBERS ABSENT: President & CEO of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan Maria Gonzalez-Cortes; City Commissioner Jim White

ALSO PRESENT: County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio; Assistant County Administrator Wayman Britt; Executive Assistant to the Board Jamie Groom; Corporate Counsel Dan Ophoff; Commissioner Harold Mast; Grand Rapids City Manager Greg Sundstrom; Deputy Grand Rapids City Manager Eric DeLong; State Business Ombudsmen MEDC Amy Banninga, Executive Director of Grand Valley Metropolitan Council John Weiss; Scott Atchison

NEWS MEDIA: David Czurak, Grand Rapids Business Journal

Mr. Saalfeld called the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

I. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes from February 1, 2012, were reviewed and approved.

II. **GOALS OF GOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION**

Mr. Saalfeld welcomed the group and reiterated that his focus lies in increasing efficiencies, being effective, and stimulating economic development; good government leads to these.

Mr. Saalfeld distributed a handout: The Kent County Experience (with reference to the County's experience with collaborative efforts) and asked Mr. Delabbio to expand upon it.

Mr. Delabbio presented the information included in the handout and elaborated on some aspects. He also cited various collaborative efforts in which the County is participating.

Mr. Saalfeld asked Ms. Klohs, Mr. Baker and Dr. Isely to speak about their goals of collaborative efforts within the community.

Ms. Klohs shared that during the past year, The Right Place, Inc, with the urging of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, has been involved in a collaboration of 13 counties, all with vast differences of available resources. Some of the goals and challenges of the collaboration have included gaining trust amongst all the counties, and figuring out how to work together to position West Michigan in a global market. Ms. Klohs stated that the goal of the collaboration is to create “cooperative transparency” through standardized practices across the region.

Mr. Baker cited two collaborations involving the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce. With combining resources, more can be achieved through a larger voice – especially in the public policy arena. With regard to his past experience working in a community that collaborated with four counties in two states, traits of the area that were formerly perceived to be negative were used to the area’s advantage through collaboration. He added that collaborative efforts keep groups from duplicating work.

Ms. Klohs added that it is important to find out what industries counties have in common and find a way to serve all the counties. She used the analogy of a bell curve to illustrate how to compare things groups have in common, yet there will be some outlying things which they will not have in common.

Dr. Isely provided an academic perspective of collaborations and what they mean for organizations. Collaboration asks organizations to review their systems and look at historical reasons for reaching the point where they exist now. Then they look at how they can all work together. They can sometimes – but not always – provide efficiencies of scale.

Mr. Baker stated that overcoming challenges in collaborations is a process and doesn’t always happen quickly; it takes commitment to work through the “pain part” of the process.

Ms. Klohs added that in the 13-county project which The Right Place, Inc. is leading, commitment and engagement from local boards/commissions is essential. And, to gain trust and help learn what each county has to offer is important. The meeting locations are rotated between counties.

Mr. Saalfeld reiterated what Dr. Isely said – one of the goals of collaboration may be to achieve an economy of scales and realize some efficiency. There has to be thought that goes into this, because those two things don’t naturally occur when talking about collaboration.

Dr. Isely said that with collaboration, people are being asked to change, and people don’t like to change. It brings fear of “what am I going to lose?” A goal of collaborating is to get people to the point that they can realize what they are gaining.

Ms. Bliss stated that no collaboration can be successful without building relationships and having a certain level of trust.

Mr. Baker stated that excellent leadership is also critical.

Ms. Klohs added that transparency and consistency of timely information sharing is essential in her collaboration for maintaining trust amongst those who are not immediately involved.

Mr. Saalfeld noted that new collaborations must go through a process to result in increased quality service and will not likely have an immediate end result with this outcome.

Mr. DeVries added that sometimes it costs more to provide better service.

Mr. DeLong stated that it's important to identify common interests and align them. To collaborate, it is key that groups find something bigger than the individual units.

III. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS

Handout – Summary of major functions and services provided by local units of government in Kent County. A work group which included CCWG members Jim Brown, Cathy Vander Meulen, Mike DeVries along with County staff, revised the matrix. The document narrows services down into major functions and groups them.

Mr. Brown stated that he feels the matrix is a fairly good summary of most of the major functions of local government. He gave an overview of how to read and understand what the document says.

Mr. Saalfeld said that in future meetings, the work group will take time looking at the areas and discussing them individually. When the process is finished, the group will have a better understanding of what the functions are but also aid the group in identifying areas where there can be continued, new or additional collaborations. Or, perhaps it will provide information to prove the opposite.

Mr. DeVries said that some of the services identified on the matrix are highly local and are that way because of individual community choice/need. This is why the constitution allows for discretionary services.

Ms. Klohs said that she sees collaboration like a bell curve; what things are in common – what do the citizens want in their community? Is working towards a way of collaborating more critical than it is to save money? Resources are not what they used to be, but at the same time, people are asking for twice as much. To automatically assume that collaboration will save money is not accurate. The focus should be on

looking at ways to collaborate on those services that the local units of government have in common, not the 'outlier' services that may be specific to one or two communities.

Mr. Baker added that savings isn't the only measure of success.

Ms. Bliss stated that as budgets have been suffering over the last several years, she has seen a lot of quality-of-life services cut. With this, there is a direct impact on public safety, economic development, neighborhoods, business districts, etc. She spends a lot of her time with the Grand Rapids City Commission on this issue and feels that government should look at the issue as a region. What do we want our quality of life to be? She feels there is a lot of room for collaboration with these types of services.

Mr. Saalfeld thanked the small committee for its work reviewing the matrix.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 21, 2012; 7:30 am.

Mr. Saalfeld adjourned the meeting at 8:29 am.