

Community Collaboration Work Group
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 11, 2012; 7:30 a.m.
Room 310 - County Administration Building

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Attorney Jim Brown; President & CEO of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan Maria Gonzalez-Cortes

ALSO PRESENT: County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio; Assistant County Administrators Wayman Britt & Mary Swanson; Executive Assistant to the Board Jamie Groom; County Corporate Counsel Dan Ophoff; County Commissioner Harold Mast; Grand Rapids City Manager Greg Sundstrom; Deputy Grand Rapids City Manager Eric DeLong; Sheriff Larry Stelma; Grand Rapids Police Chief Kevin Belk; State Business Ombudsmen MEDC Amy Banninga; County Management Analyst Jen DeHaan; Scott Atchison

NEWS MEDIA: David Czurak, Grand Rapids Business Journal

Mr. Saalfeld called the meeting to order at 7:34 a.m.

I. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes from March 21, 2012, were reviewed and approved.

II. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – JUDICIAL SERVICES - CONTINUED**

Handouts – “Court Costs”

Mr. Ophoff introduced the Court Costs grid which was distributed prior to the meeting. He stated all of the courts utilize different software and cannot communicate with one another at this time.

Ms. Klohs asked if it is allowable under current Michigan statute to collapse courts into one larger court.

Mr. Saalfeld answered yes and no – there are some consequences and statutes – but there are areas where there is room to consolidate. Again, 63rd District Court was used as a good example.

Ms. Klohs asked if it is necessary to have six District Courts in the County.

Mr. Saalfeld stated that in comparison to other areas of the state, a study showed that Kent County Courts are actually understaffed.

Mr. Ophoff said districts are set up by statute and the judges are allocated.

Mr. Saalfeld clarified that they are reducing the number of judges within the District Courts, not eliminating districts.

Mr. Ophoff agreed and said that districts could be consolidated.

Mr. DeVries asked if Kent County and Grand Rapids share the Courthouse in Grand Rapids. It was clarified that yes, the 61st District Court is also located in the Courthouse downtown with the County Circuit Courts.

Mr. Baker asked if the Work Group will be developing criteria to go back and evaluate the opportunities for making efficiencies.

Mr. Saalfeld said that if the Work Group feels there are areas with connections with the four C's, we should try to identify those.

Ms. Klohs expressed concern that this Work Group should have something of substance to present at the end of the year.

Mr. Wawee agreed.

Mr. Sundstrom stated that tax payers are putting more than \$40 million of general fund money into the courts; he would like the work group to look into finding solutions for substantial savings in this cost.

Ms. Bliss asked what the logic or philosophy is behind having a single large Circuit Court vs. smaller District Courts and not simply having a single District Court for the County.

Mr. Ophoff answered that it is a general function of caseload and population.

Mr. White noted that it appears that costs are heavily dependent on the non-general fund revenue. When crime goes down, revenue to the courts goes down. He would like the work group to consider ways to make courts sustainable when they are so heavily dependent on crime-generated revenue.

Mr. Delabbio stated that the State pays only a portion of the judges' salaries and suggested that one option is to have the State take over the Court System and its funding.

Mr. Sundstrom stated that the cost of one court for the State of Michigan is relatively small. Most all the restrictions are statutory. Grand Rapids doesn't consider this as a barrier, just good logic and a need to change the law. He believes that the efficiency of the courts isn't the problem but rather the structure in which they are operated. He said that

originally, having District Courts throughout the County was an issue of transportation. The courts will never consolidate, because of the concentration of poverty.

Mr. Ophoff noted that with the consolidation of the 63rd District Court, there are efficiencies in the new facility, savings in the maintenance of one building and savings for attorneys and clients only having to go to one building. Also, when staff leaves employment, the County is able to increase staff efficiencies. There was no reason why the two buildings could not be combined into one.

Mr. DeVries added that the new building was built to have a third court operating there, so it is ready for expansion. He also wanted it to be clear that the term "District Court" does not refer to the building, it is the actual judge; districts are a function of caseload and population.

Summary of Discussion:

Much of the discussion regarding the Judicial Services centered on funding and actions that would require State legislative changes (not local). However, because these are significant issues in terms of local funding, the consensus was that a separate group, with subject matter expertise, look more closely at this topic and determine where changes or modifications to Michigan law may be appropriate to pursue. The goal of such a group would be to identify possible changes in the law that might provide for a more effective and efficient judicial service system through collaboration, cooperation and/or consolidation.

Other action items that are a result of the discussions include: (i) examining administrative functions that could be carried out centrally vs. by each District or Circuit Court, and (ii) considering other collaborative opportunities at it relates to court locations (not judges) similar to the 63rd District Court consolidation of two locations (Rockford and Grand Rapids Township) into one location.

III. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – PUBLIC SAFETY, PATROL AND INVESTIGATIONS

Sheriff Larry Stelma and Chief Kevin Belk gave a joint presentation regarding cooperative efforts in the core six cities of Kent County.

Sheriff Stelma stated that the first collaborative effort with law enforcement began 100 years ago next week. The 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic will be Saturday, April 14. Within days of the sinking, it was Senator Smith from Grand Rapids who organized a congressional resolution through Congress to have a congressional investigation of the sinking of the Titanic. Sheriff Carol of Kent County and Sheriff Bayliss of Chippewa County were brought to Washington to take part in this investigation.

Sheriff Stelma reported that since the 1980's, the City of Grand Rapids has provided the canine services for the County and the County in turn provides marine and polygraph services for the City of Grand Rapids. This agreement is still in existence today. In

the 1990's, the Children's Assessment Center was created and serves as a unique collaborative agreement with many agencies benefiting children across Kent County.

Sheriff Stelma listed many of the collaborative programs and initiatives of the six cities, including: Silent Observer, Mounted Unit, Drug Team, Cold Case Team, Violent Crimes Team, White Collar Crime Team (six agencies who investigate check fraud, etc), Honor Guard, Kentwood/Woodland Mall gang, collaborative training efforts, dispatch collaborative, and purchasing processes for various agencies. He stated that departments are in the process of doing evidence collection and crime scene investigation together and hold joint agreements for emergency management for the community. Not all six agencies are equally involved, but all are involved in some of these ventures and all agencies see the benefits. Sheriff Stelma travels the state and is not aware of other places where the Sheriffs and Chiefs work together the way they do here.

Chief Belk spoke regarding the Mutual Aid Agreement developed in December 2004 (which replaced one from 1993). It is based upon the idea that all will benefit from mutual assistance; from time to time each department will require this. The 2004 agreement allowed for addendums without having to go back to the municipal bodies/commissions for approval. Under the agreement, all agencies bear their own cost; mutual participation is the adequate compensation. Overall, it is a fairly equitable system.

Chief Belk stated that the departments pull together when they need to utilize the mutual services. The Metro Oversight Board oversees the Mutual Aid Agreement and is comprised of chiefs from the six urban cities, State Police and the Sheriff. This group meets monthly and oversees the Agreement and its operations. An example of how this agreement work is for Presidential visits; they require a lot of manpower and quite often the Kentwood Police Department helps the Grand Rapids Police Department with responding to calls when their manpower is stressed. There is also a tremendous value to have a Cold Case Team and the Identity Fraud and Theft Team available to residents. The special teams are housed in different departments – so the responsibility for the teams is spread across various departments.

Chief Belk stated that shootings in Grand Rapids and Kentwood brought together a taskforce where the departments work together without it being a bureaucratic process. Accident reconstruction is another example of the way the departments collaborate. There are a number of other collaborative efforts happening on an ongoing basis. These collaborative efforts are very unusual and only possible through a great relationship amongst departments. Where the numbers are not quantifiable, it is known that these efforts asave dollars by being able to staff at a lower level knowing that the agencies will come together if there is an emergency.

Due to time, there were no questions. Both speakers were asked to return on May 2, 2012.

IV. OPEN BUSINESS/OTHER ITEMS

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Scott Atchison presented his plan for a centralized information booth and shared his vision to re-brand the County of Kent as “Grand Kent.”

VII. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 2, 2012; 7:30 am.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Saalfeld adjourned the meeting at 8:38 am.