

Community Collaboration Work Group
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 1, 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); President of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Rick Baker; Attorney Jim Brown; Grand Rapids Township Supervisor Mike DeVries; County Commissioners Carol Hennessy, Dan Koorndyk, and Mike Wawee Jr.; Grand Valley State University Professor of Economics Paul Isely; President & CEO of The Right Place, Inc. Birgit Klohs; Walker City Manager Cathy Vander Meulen

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

ALSO PRESENT: County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio; Assistant County Administrator Wayman Britt; Executive Assistant to the Board Jamie Groom; Grand Rapids City Manager Greg Sundstrom; County Management Analyst Jen DeHaan; State Business Ombudsmen MEDC Amy Banninga; Scott Atchison

NEWS MEDIA: None.

Mr. Saalfeld called the meeting to order at 7:40 am.

I. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes from July 11, 2012, were reviewed and approved.

II. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – RECAP OF EMS/FIRE**

Mr. Saalfeld solicited the members of the work group if they had any follow-up questions, additions or take-aways from last meeting's presentation about EMS and fire.

Ms. Bliss noted that there is already a lot of work being done between Kentwood, Wyoming and Grand Rapids fire, and it is important to recognize that. The three cities are waiting for results of an International City/County Management Association (ICMA) study. Philosophically they would support a regional or metropolitan fire department.

Mr. Saalfeld asked Mr. Sundstrom if he would release them to the work group for review when these results are available.

Mr. Sundstrom said that the City will take some time to review and interpret the results which should be available in August, and he will release them after they have had a chance to do this.

Ms. Vander Meulen asked if the work group's report will include collaborations and consolidations that are already in process. She suggested that the report expand on the

things that the fire and police are doing, such as: automatic aid and mutual aid agreements. These can be examined to see if there are other things that could be done based on those models.

Mr. Saalfeld agreed that the Work Group's report should include areas where there are projects in process.

Mr. Baker asked if the cities who are collaborating would welcome others to opt-in.

Ms. Klohs stated that if there are other communities who are in areas not contingent to those already collaborating, they should be encouraged to collaborate with other municipalities near by.

Mr. DeVries stated that whether a community opts-in to a collaboration is need-based and data driven.

Ms. Klohs suggested the report reflect that there are collaborations taking place now.

Ms. Bliss said that the Kent Emergency Management System (KEMS) report contains interesting data and should be referred to and used to inform this Work Group's decision making – especially for medical response.

Mr. Saalfeld said that he would have the KEMS report circulated to the Work Group members. He feels that the KEMS report focused on efficiencies and approach versus consolidation and collaboration. However, it would still be a good report for the Work Group to become familiar with.

Mr. Sundstrom agreed reviewing the KEMS report may provide the next-step to this discussion. The report is a total-County analysis and would apply to everything this group is discussing. If a better system existed with less duplication and more efficiency, the results would be amazing.

In response to a question by Ms. Hennessy, Mr. Wawee gave a brief overview of the Kent County Fire Commission's work in sharing equipment and insurance costs for smaller municipalities. Training is also an area of cooperation through the Commission. Smaller municipalities are able to obtain equipment it would not otherwise be able to afford, such as expensive pumper trucks, because of the Fire Commission.

Mr. Wawee added that it is the responsibility and obligation of those who work at the government level to educate the public better.

Mr. DeVries asked how much money the County allocates to the Fire Commission.

Mr. Delabbio said that the County contributes approximately \$150,000 per year.

Mr. DeVries illustrated the work of the Fire Commission using Tyrone Township as an example. Their annual budget is around \$300,000/year. One pumper truck costs approximately \$400,000. He questioned how, without the Fire Commission, would a small community afford that? He explained that there is a 17-year life cycle which communities pay into. The County adding to that fund helps those communities provide paid, on-call fire service by providing training, insuring trucks and firefighters. The Fire Commission is a wonderful partnership that keeps costs low and meets the needs of the communities in the rural areas.

Ms. Bliss said that a public safety-type department was examined for the City of Grand Rapids. With a city the size and density of Grand Rapids, it was found that there are many needs which require specialty services such as: drug teams, high rises, etc. They found that larger urban areas with a high demand for specialty training are not always going to find a cost savings by utilizing a public safety department.

Mr. Sundstrom added that savings are not estimated to accrue until after the first 10 years of operation.

Mr. Baker said that when taxpayers perceive inefficiencies in areas, they are less inclined to vote to pay more to support services.

Mr. Wawee said that the average taxpayer is not able to be at the table making these decisions, so they may not understand what is happening. They just believe they pay too many taxes and are unaware of where that money is going. The government needs to show examples, be transparent and educate the public about the use of tax dollars.

Mr. DeVries added that the taxpayer makes a check out to their taxing authority and usually doesn't know where their money goes. They believe it goes to the municipality where they pay. In reality, the municipality is only the collector for the majority of the taxes and passes on most of the taxes collected. Elected officials have the job of helping the public to understand what the government's functions are.

Mr. Saalfeld suggested that this Work Group drill down on areas where it doesn't see efficiencies.

Ms. Vander Meulen cautioned about saying services are inefficient until after looking at the community's needs and data.

Summaries and Take Aways from Discussions on Safety (Fire Services and EMR/First Responder Services):

- Cities and Townships have a mix of full-time, part-time and paid-on-call personnel for fire services. This often represents one the largest elements of a budget. Grand Rapids uses a full-service fire force that responds to fire calls 1/3 of the time and medical 2/3 of the time. Very expensive to equip and train this 24/7 force. GRFD is an ISO Level 2 (one of the best in the country). A study of consolidating the cities of Kentwood, Wyoming and Grand Rapids is due next month. A recent Kent County EMS study was done that contained various recommendations to reduce redundancy and cost, and

improve service. Grand Rapids sends fire to all medical calls – other models do it differently. Now is a good opportunity to make some changes.

- The City of Walker spoke on their experiences. They have a separate police and fire force, but unified command that also handles H/R, training, etc. (i.e., a nominal public safety model). They have full time fire services from 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. Fire is not medical first response – but police are. They also use “closest vehicle response” which would allow fire to respond to medical call if police is tied up. False alarms are 50% of fire calls. Fire is \$1.4 Million of budget (up 4% from the prior year).
- Grand Rapids Township stated that most rural townships use paid-on-call personnel, while the suburban townships use a combination of full-time and paid-on-call. These are well-trained and well-paid professionals. Many serve other duties (e.g., park workers, maintenance, public works, etc.). The decision on fire and EMS models is all about population density, higher density the greater the number of calls for service. The stations and personnel in GRT are located where the calls for service are the greatest. GRT staffs a mix of full-time and paid-on-call fire personnel 24/7. Staffing schedules are based on what statistics show for the likelihood of calls. For EMS/MFR, GRT contracts with a private ambulance company that locates its assets in township stations. Fire personnel are MFR certified but medical first response is not their primary focus. GRT has about 3 medical calls a day and 1.1 fire calls per day. Most of the fire calls are minor in nature but require a response. GRT spends about \$1.1 Million on fire/EMS/public safety for 16,600 people. The model a community uses should be data driven to meet the needs of the community.
- East Grand Rapids Manager Brian Donovan provided a summary and answered questions on the Public Safety model. There are three models (i) Nominal – integration of executive functions of fire and police but each branch remains separate, (ii) Partial – limited integration where some are cross-trained and some are not, and (iii) Full – complete consolidation and integration. EGR has a full public safety. 30 cities in Michigan use this (more than other states) the largest of which is Kalamazoo. Many efficiencies and cost savings (27.5% reduction of personnel, faster and more effective response, decrease in administrative functions, fewer facilities, enhanced unified command, etc.). In some instances, it will not make sense (e.g., if fire is mostly volunteer). Start-up costs will be higher at first, and there will be a 2-3 year transition process. Police seemed more willing to make the transition than fire.
- Collaborative efforts regarding Fire and EMS are already taking place through multiple mutual aid agreements and other efforts such as the County Fire Commission (a collaborative effort with many jurisdictions that provide shared/reduced costs for insurance, equipment and training). Better public education of these efforts needs to occur - explaining what works and letting people know that their tax dollars are being well and wisely spent. In addition, more collaboration and consolidation opportunities exist and should be pursued since this is one of the largest portions of municipal budgets. But any efforts must be needs based and data driven (considering population, density, greatest value, etc.).

III. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/HOUSING

Mr. Delabbio said that each local unit of government, with the exception of Wyoming and Grand Rapids, participate in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The County receives money from the federal government, and each community is allocated a certain amount based on a variety of factors. The County is the distributor of these funds and receives a small allocation itself. Wyoming and Grand Rapids, who have populations over 50,000 people, have their own programs through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Kent County has a Housing Commission, as does the Cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Rockford. In Rockford's case, it's separate from the CDBG program, but in Kent County, it is one office. There have been discussions about having a collaboration between the offices of Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Kent County. This collaboration would look similar to the consolidation of the City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County.

Mr. Sundstrom said that there are several federal grants to provide federally subsidized social services. Because it is the federal government, there are many rules which prescribe exactly how money can be spent. It is confining and doesn't allow for spending creativity. Wyoming, Grand Rapids and Kent County met at the request of Mr. Delabbio to talk about possible consolidation. After a series of questions, it was unanimous that this move forward. Federal dollars intended for one community may not be spent in another, so the funds would need to stay separate. The federal rules are stringent enough that the communities could not take away from one another, and there are a lot of efficiencies that can be gained from a single management structure.

Mr. Delabbio said that as a result of reduced administrative overhead, there would only be moderate savings for the organizations, but the efficiencies could result in more funding for projects. The end-user would see these efficiencies.

Ms. Vander Meulen asked if there is separate staff to administer the CDBG.

Mr. Sundstrom answered that all three cities currently have separate staff to administer these grants.

Ms. Klohs said that the CDBG is a national program. Smaller communities receive money through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). While money from the federal government is allocated to larger cities, for example, Kent County, in a smaller county like Ionia, they don't get an allocation. CDBG money is distributed for projects through the MEDC which is somewhat more flexible in scope. Kent County is living under different rules because it receives its own allocation. Other similar communities are: Oakland, Wayne, Macomb, and Washtenaw Counties; they are called "entitlement communities."

Mr. Saalfeld asked for clarification in that the administration of the programs would be consolidated versus the actual programs (due to the rules).

Mr. Sundstrom said that the cities would perform strategic planning together but keep the funds separate. For example, Grand Rapids has to submit a plan to the federal government, and it is difficult to spend outside of the plan. He added that he is unsure that even in a consolidation like the one proposed by One Kent, that CDBG funds could be applied towards economic development. Since the funding is needs-based upon the community, it is unlikely that it would be approved to take money away from the community's needs to work on economic development.

Ms. Klohs said that MEDC is tasked with job creation – because that was their plan. So, they are funding projects which create jobs.

Ms. Banninga explained that the arrangement with the MEDC gives smaller communities the ability to receive money to fund projects. Whereas, an allocation would be so small it wouldn't make much of a difference.

Mr. Saalfeld asked why funds that the City receives may go to individuals living in a township.

Mr. Sundstrom stated that vouchers are need-based and go to those who qualify and are in need. It doesn't matter where they live. Grand Rapids is simply a pass-through for funds.

Mr. Britt said that there are portability rules that allow residents with needs to get funds from other areas.

Mr. Delabbio added that some federal funds from Grand Rapids go to County residents and vice-versa.

Mr. Delabbio also added that a county with a Housing Commission is more on the voucher end of business. Kent County's housing program is not as robust as that of Rockford, Wyoming or Grand Rapids.

Mr. Saalfeld said that there is a lot of overlap with the Housing Commissions but asked if it would be difficult to have a consolidated administration.

Mr. Sundstrom stated that at his level, it is more difficult. Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Kent County seem like prime candidates for consolidation, but that is a decision that would need to come from a higher level. The Housing Commission is like an independent authority, and they would have to make the decision to consolidate into a single Housing Commission.

Ms. Klohs said that looking forward, she'd like to paint picture of what's happening under the radar. Then, tackle the "low hanging fruit" to find short and mid-term recommendations. In the long-term, work towards a consolidated Housing Commission so that the goal is not lost.

Mr. Saalfeld asked if the Work Group has enough information to make that recommendation. What would we have to do to achieve a collaborative or consolidated effort?

Ms. Klohs said that if you lose it as a long-term strategic goal, it will never happen.

Mr. Delabbio agreed that the short-term goal is to consolidate the Community Development piece. Longer term goal could be to consolidate the Housing Commission piece.

Mr. Sundstrom stated that the County is a voucher-only program while the City is not.

Mr. DeVries said that this is an area for additional research and education for the Work Group to make a recommendation.

Ms. Bliss asked Ms. Klohs which other cities in the area have Economic Development Departments.

Ms. Klohs answered that Grand Rapids is the only city in the region to have one.

Mr. Sundstrom added that the Economic Development Department for the City of Grand Rapids works on development that The Right Place, Inc. generally doesn't, within its borders.

Ms. Klohs added that the only dedicated Economic Development Director is in the City of Grand Rapids. There are other municipalities who have employees whose job duties include economic development, but they are not solely dedicated to it.

IV. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – PLANNING & ZONING

Mr. Delabbio distributed a handout which summarized what collaborative efforts are taking place for building inspection services in Kent County. He praised Cascade Township for contracting its services to other communities. There are a number of private inspection companies that serve multiple communities in Kent County as well. There are four communities that have in-house, full-time building inspection staff.

Ms. Klohs stated that she has expressed concern over the years at the consistency.

Mr. Delabbio stated that the inspection fees are established by the municipality and paid to the private company. The municipality gets a percentage of the fees paid.

Mr. DeVries clarified that there is still a portion of that work that has to be done within the community. The percentage of the fees that is given to the municipality has to be used for building inspection services, and they don't necessarily cover all of the expenses.

Ms. Hennessy asked if there is more cohesion in these communities.

Mr. DeVries answered, no. Zoning is not impacted by inspection services.

Ms. Bliss added that a lot of communities contract for services from other public entities. Water inspection services for the City of Grand Rapids was recently contracted with the City of Walker.

Mr. Saalfeld said that it is considered a collaboration and that it may be impossible to capture all of the collaborations that are going on at this time. If communities have a list of their collaborations, they should be attached to the Work Group's final report.

Mr. Delabbio stated that lists have been compiled in the past. They aren't current and would need to be updated. He keeps an ongoing list of County collaborations, and it grows constantly.

Mr. DeVries said that Cascade Township has been providing inspections for other municipalities for over 20 years. It was discovered that there is a limited geographical area where they can be effective. There are efficiencies within a region. The communities that are collaborating with Cascade are in close proximity to the township. Providing the service has to be cost effective and efficient for all parties involved.

V. OTHER BUSINESS/OPEN ITEMS

Mr. Saalfeld asked Work Group members to bring their calendars to the meeting scheduled for September 5, 2012, so that a special four-hour meeting can be arranged.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VII. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 5, 2012, 7:30 a.m.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Saalfeld adjourned the meeting at 8:48 a.m.