

**WINCHESTER COMMON COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2009
MINUTES
8:00 a.m.**

PRESENT: Councilors John Hill, Milt McInturff, Les Veach, and John Willingham (4)

ABSENT: President Buettner, Vice-President Major, Mayor Minor, Vice-Mayor Butler, and Councilor Clark. (5)

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael Foreman, Charles Gaynor, City Manager Brannon Godfrey, Assistant City Manager Anne Lewis, and City Attorney Anthony Williams.

City Manager Brannon Godfrey called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. and turned the meeting over to Mr. Foreman and Mr. Gaynor for the Unification Briefing.

Mr. Foreman, chairman of the Unification Steering Committee, stated in the early 1990's, the 20/20 Project consisted of 300 citizens who studied the two governing bodies over a period of two years. The recommendation from the project was to begin consolidating services one at a time. In 2004, Council President Charley Gaynor and Board of Supervisor Chairman Dick Shickle began looking at consolidation again and asked him to chair the Steering Committee. The committee consisted of 13 members and several sub-committees. A representative from Richmond informed the committee on what would be allowed by state law. Previous City Manager Ed Dailey and County Administrator John Riley were concerned about the high demand on staff to get the information needed for the committee. It was decided to do the study in two phases, gather the information to see what it would look like and education. Because of the complexity of some departments, it was suggested the committee first decide what type of government they wanted, city or county. When dealing with the employees, the current law states the senior member of the two individuals becomes the principle and the other becomes the deputy or assistant. The biggest opponent to consolidation has been the constitutional officers. At a meeting in April of 2008, the Steering Committee presented the reports and suggested hiring a chief administrator to gather more data. The committee on Fire & Rescue suggested consolidating the 911 operations immediately even if nothing else is ever done.

Mr. Gaynor stated the direction of the committees was unclear at first but half way through the process, it was decided to create a design to combine the departments based on having one government.

Mr. Foreman stated a decision would have to be made on what pay plan would be used when combining departments. By law, the higher scale of the two governments must be used. However, it is also state law that the state must give start up money to fund the higher pay scale for a few years. Both bodies of government would have to have more data before determining the cost savings that could be made.

Mr. Gaynor stated the consolidation process is simple but the politics involved make it difficult.

Councilor McInturff asked why the consolidation isn't already done. Mr. Gaynor stated he was going off Council and did not feel comfortable leaving the new council to deal with the decisions

the old council made. He also discussed it with Mr. Shickle who felt awkward about carrying the torch by him self on this issue.

Mr. Foreman stated that no one knew what would happen to the economy then but we need to look at it to benefit the citizens. Virginia is the last state to have the split government design between counties and cities.

Councilor Veach asked how staff would be handled when the consolidation occurred. Mr. Gaynor stated the goal was to make a road map on how to do it but that goal changed over time. Most people think consolidation will save money over the long run. Mr. Foreman added attrition would be expected to help with staff over time.

Councilor McInturff asked if the money from the state is still available. Mr. Foreman stated he was not sure.

Councilor Willingham asked if the committee considered having a consultant look at it. Mr. Foreman stated the committee did not have money to hire a consultant but that was the recommendation in the end to provide the two bodies more data.

Mr. Gaynor stated Dick Helm suggested setting a goal for consolidation and chart a schedule over 8-10 years so attrition would take care of the problem of people losing their jobs in the process.

Councilor Hill asked Mr. Gaynor what his position on unification was then as an elected official compared to now as a citizen. Mr. Gaynor stated this cannot be dropped. At a minimum, some of the departments should be combined to save costs and provide better services. There is a grand opportunity to unify and it should be done using Mr. Helm's plan.

Mr. Foreman stated he voted for it in 1968 and feels more strongly about it now. He doesn't know if it will happen but it could happen. If something doesn't happen, he fears Winchester will have to revert back to a town or declare bankruptcy in 10 years due to the closed in location and the growth in the county. The bodies tried to get revenue sharing passed a few years ago but couldn't get it done. The studies were made up of citizens and the citizens have said twice now they want this considered. The joint projects run very well and the citizens don't know the difference as long as they get the service.

Councilor Willingham stated it has been his experience that a merger fails because of culture. He asked if it was considered how to handle the consolidation and how to handle representation for both with the two stakeholders. Mr. Gaynor stated that when this first started, the ESL population in the county was minimal but it has increased so they are looking at it differently now. The issues were addressed but when it comes to building new schools and water issues, the city can see the light at the end of the tunnel but the county can't because they are still expanding.

Mr. Foreman stated the question needs to be asked if consolidation could help the current problems that exist in the city and the county such as the situation between paid staff and volunteers at the fire halls. Schools would benefit from consolidation as well and he gave Loudoun County as an example.

Mr. Godfrey stated an impartial consultant's point of view would be helpful with items like handling the employees and the division of assets. He could see the possibility of those on the inside seeing too many complications with the process.

Councilor Hill requested a copy of the 20/20 project and suggested it may have information on a possible solution. Mr. Foreman stated it was a general recommendation and did not give cost factors or a structure. The current reports give an example of what the departments could look like but more information is needed on cost.

Mr. Godfrey stated the next step will be to decide if Council would like to meet with the Board of Supervisors for further discussion.

Mr. Foreman gave one more example of where consolidation could help. He stated that currently 98% of the law enforcement in the county is paid for by the state but Winchester pays 98% of the cost for its law enforcement.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

Kari J. Van Diest
Deputy Clerk of the Common Council