January 28, 2016

MEMO TO: Tony Takitani, Chair,
and Members of the Special Committee on County Governance

F R O M: Kimberley Willenbrink, Legislative Analyst *KW*
Sharon Brooks, Legislative Attorney *SB*

SUBJECT: **FORMS OF COUNTY GOVERNANCE** (STRUCTURE AND PERFORMANCE; OTHER COUNTIES AND CITIES) (CG-1(3))

INTRODUCTION

Please accept this as an addendum to our memoranda dated January 22, 2016.

We have reviewed and briefly describe below the following materials:

1) "More Than Mayor Or Manager: Campaigns to Change Form of Government in America's Large Cities" (James H. Svara and Douglas J. Watson, Editors; Georgetown University Press, 2010, 361 pages)

2) "Governing Cincinnati: Considerations and Opportunities" (Kimberly Nelson and Carl Stenberg; Cincinnati Research Institute, 2015, 30 pages)

3) "Smarter, Faster, Cheaper: An Operations Efficiency Benchmarking Study of 100 American Cities" by IBM (David Edwards, IBM Global Services, 2011, 19 pages)

1) "MORE THAN MAYOR OR MANAGER"

This book examined seven cities with populations over 100,000 that since 1990 changed from County Manager to Strong Mayor form; four cities that rejected a change from County Manager to Strong Mayor form; and two cities that changed from Strong Mayor to County Manager form.

From these case studies, which include reviews of both media reports and academic literature, the editors compiled the following:

Arguments for Strong Mayor	Critiques of Strong Mayor
Mayor provides strong leadership.	Performance is too dependent on one person; effectiveness can rise and fall with qualities of the Mayor.
Mayor can form coalitions on the council and in the community by rewarding supporters and sanctioning opponents.	Mayors lack equal levels of political and executive skills.
Voters hold one person accountable.	Mayors have excessive power and are more prone to corruption; when faced with obstacles, Mayors seek more power.
Strong Mayor provides greater capacity to initiate major policy changes.	Conflict between the Mayor and council is common; there is a risk of impasse between the two seats of power.
Mayor can allocate resources to support her or his agenda and to respond to demands of supporters.	Shortcomings in accountability: separation of powers creates unclear lines of responsibility; review of performance by voters in elections is infrequent; emphasis on election success makes Mayor accountable to supporters rather than all voters.

Arguments for County Manager	**Critiques of County Manager**
Council is a governing board that focuses on coherent policymaking and oversight of administrative performance.	Council is prone to dissension; no one can overcome dissension on the council.
County Manager provides policy advice based on objective assessment of trends, needs, and community goals.	Too many masters brings diffusion of power and accountability.
Typically a cooperative relationship exists between the County Manager and council.	County Manager acquires too much influence if not properly supervised.
County establishes long-term goals and maintains continuity of commitments.	County Manager is narrowly focused on improving efficiency.
County administration is innovative and incorporates leading best practices.	Turnover in the County Manager position can weaken government; council can arbitrarily remove County Manager.
Decisions reflect universal values such as equality, fairness, social equity, inclusiveness, responsiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness.	Having County Manager does not guarantee competence and high ethical standards.
County Manager is continuously accountable to the council for performance.	Form is efficient in small matters but not in taking on major initiatives.
Minority groups are empowered as members of the governing body.	

2) "GOVERNMENT CINCINNATI"

The Cincinnati (Ohio) City Council commissioned this report as it considered the merits of adopting a Strong Mayor form of governance for the first time. The authors noted the following:

> *In most council-manager municipalities, the basic features of the plan have not changed dramatically over a century. They include:*
> *+ Appointment of a professionally trained manager who serves as an at-will employee of the governing body;*
> *+ Delegation of executive authority to the manager, including budget preparation and administration, and the hiring, supervision, and firing of all staff who are not direct appointees of the governing body;*
> *+ Adherence by the manager to high ethical standards;*
> *+ Separation of the major roles and responsibilities between the governing body and manager, with the former chiefly responsible for policy making, budget approval, and political agenda-setting;*
> *+ Involvement of the manager as an impartial advisor to the governing body during the policy-formulation process;*
> *+ Election of the governing body members on a nonpartisan, at-large basis;*
> *+ Selection of the mayor from among governing body members;*
> *+ Successful mayors use facilitative leadership skills with formal authority typically limited to ceremonial powers and tiebreaker votes.*

Under "Findings," the authors state:

> *Major changes in the form of local government are uncommon. Reform campaigns do not usually command much public interest and enthusiasm, leading to referendum failures. Since 1995, only ten municipalities with populations of at least 100,000 have changed their form of government.*

In the report's conclusion, the authors offered caution: *"Whatever the reforms that are put before the voters, it is essential that the proposed charter provisions are clear and free of ambiguity on these and other important governance areas."*

3) "SMARTER, FASTER, CHEAPER"

The IBM report studied the operations of the 100 largest cities in the United States. The most notable opinion might be this: *"Cities with city manager forms of government are nearly 10% more efficient that [sic] cities with strong mayor forms of government."*

In the report's conclusion, though, the author acknowledged, *"more questions have been generated than answers."* He listed the following findings:

- *Spending and employment levels varies widely among cities delivering a similar set of services;*
- *This variation in resource utilization cannot be explained by exogenous factors such as differences in scale, geographic coverage or labor market conditions;*
- *Management choices – particularly those related to strategic decisions dictating the scope and level of services delivered and operating decisions impacting the productivity of labor – appear to be the primary drivers of relative efficiency.*

The report's final paragraph included this statement:

There is no perfectly efficient organization out there. As this study uncovered, within most local governments you will find a mix of highly efficient and highly inefficient operating units. The challenge is to figure out which is which. This, alas, is not always as easy as it seems.

S-CG:ltr:001(3)amc04:kcw

cc: Hon. Mike White, Council Chair
       Ms. Lori Teragawachi