

Lessons from Merger Workshop

Making Merger Work: What's Next?

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

12:00 – 1:30 p.m.

In this closing luncheon of the Lessons from Merger Workshop, Mayor Abramson will make remarks and then take questions in a candid dialogue with the audience on the challenges and opportunities he has dealt with in his first three years as leader of Louisville's new merged government.

Speaker: Jerry E. Abramson, the longest serving mayor in the City of Louisville's history and now the first mayor of Louisville-Jefferson County Metro.

You must be thoughtful and sensitive when combining two cultures, city and county. It is interesting when you start listening to all sides.

Here are some of the lessons learned over the past three years:

- You must be a leader instead of a manager. For the next several years, you must sell your concept of building a new government.
- Merger allows us to attract the best and brightest talent such as Chief Robert White, Louisville Metro Police Department and Dr. Adewale Troutman, Metro Health Department.
- Invest today for tomorrow-Don't go for the quick fix. For example, 20 years ago we took back the Waterfront that now attracts families and major events. We also built a baseball park for a minor league team. We also relocated 4,000 people to expand the airport. The airport expansion allowed us to attract UPS.
- It creates unity in your hometown. The community became a patchwork quilt. Each patch represented a neighborhood. People started going outside of their neighborhood to attend concerts in different parts of town. Some people had not been to these areas since the 1970's because of school desegregation.
- You must reach out to create partnerships. For example, we continue to work with higher education to convince people to go to college. Successful partnerships have lead to Yum Brands locating their headquarters here and maintaining a strong relationship with the Jefferson County School System.

Questions and Answers:

1. What are the constitutional offices?

Answer: The constitutional offices are County Clerk, Circuit Clerk, Property Valuation Administrator, Sheriff, and Coroner.

2. Do the offices of County Judge Executive and County Commissioner still exist?

Answer: These offices still exist. They are elected, but they have no power, no duties, and no salary.

3. What are the top priority issues that you are facing?

Answer: Here are the main issues of concern:

1. Consolidating emergency communication systems
2. Improving infrastructure: With more suburban growth, you need new roads to replace farm roads.
3. Ensuring green space-parks, bike pathways, and jogging paths.

4. What is the greatest challenge of the Louisville Metro Police Department for the next four or five years?

Answer: It takes time to embrace change, especially bringing together different cultures. Chief White has decentralized operations and redrew districts. Chief White's main priorities are improving communication systems and cameras, upgrading police training facilities, and cross-training officers.

5. Did the framers consider new political offices?

Answer: The biggest mistake was letting people run as democrat or republican. Frankfort would not allow it. With the Metro Council, there is too much division by political party. The division created separate caucuses with separate staffs.

6. Describe the balance of power between the Metro Council and Mayor.

Answer: The Mayor's budget must be approved by the Metro Council. The mayor has the power to veto or line veto an item. The mayor and the Metro Council can make initiatives.

7. How do you respond when people say the Merger 2000 campaign was more about Jerry Abramson?

Answer: Jerry Abramson could not run for mayor of the old city of Louisville. The Merger 2000 campaign brought former city and county leaders together to say yes to merger. Senator Mitch McConnell lent his pollster to the campaign to see what was going on. The pollster's research led to a white paper addressing the concerns of the voters. The research also showed that there were many concerns among women 24-29 years old with children and that Abramson would be the best spokesperson. The campaign went to daycare centers, did outreach on the phones, and used Abramson in the campaign ads. The ads focused on unity, attracting better jobs, and becoming the 16th largest city.

8. How do you present your budget to the Metro Council?

Answer: The mayor meets once a year with the Metro Council to present the budget. The council members receive a copy of the proposed budget on CD. The Budget Committee will ask questions and tour the various departments.

9. How do you do the capital budget?

Answer: It is based on need. There are two groups of money, one-time money and recurring money. The two groups of money never mix. Money is also spent on outside agencies such as Planned Parenthood and the Kentucky Opera. The panels divided by interests decide on the

allocation of the money. The agencies requesting money present their proposals before these panels. Each council member receives money for neighborhoods and capital projects in their neighborhoods. The requests must be approved by the rest of the Metro Council. Impact funds are for widening roads in suburban areas with fast growth.

10. Do you want to have more power on the school board?

Answer: It has not been discussed. The mayor has a full plate and feels that Dr. Stephen Daeschner is doing an excellent job as Jefferson County School Superintendent.

11. How has merger strengthened ties within the community?

Answer: Before merger, political offices were city and county wide. Now, you only vote for the one in your neighborhood. It brought us back to sidewalk politics, enhanced accountability, and connected us more to government.

12. Do you feel any resistance from suburban counties or suburban mayors?

Answer: Sometimes I create relationships with mayors in adjacent counties. I continually try to find common ground with small city mayors. Suburban mayors do an excellent job of providing services. If the suburban cities go out of business, metro government takes over those services.

13. What are doing different under Merger in terms of economic development?

Answer: We have a contract with Greater Louisville, Inc., the Metro Chamber of Commerce, to spearhead economic development efforts and to be point people. Greater Louisville Inc. also works to retain businesses. The mayor comes when needed. The State of Kentucky is the largest incentive giver for attracting new companies.