

Lessons from Merger Workshop

Louisville Metro Council
Wednesday, November 9, 2005
10:30 – 11:45 a.m.

Today's meeting addressed the issue of how merger affected Metro Council. The panel discussed the challenges, opportunities, joys, and frustrations experienced by these selected members of metro council of the two years and nine months since the 26 member council was formed.

Moderator: Tom Owen – Elected Metro Council in November of 2002 representing District Eight.

Panelists:

David Tandy – Elected Metro Council in April 2005 to serve as District Four Councilman.

- Experience of serving as an African American member of the council has not been any different than the challenges facing other members.
 - Issues are not black and white, but are issues affecting us all.
 - We are just a sum or our parts
 - All members are striving towards that same goal: making Louisville the best community it can possibly be.
- Before merger African Americans in Louisville were worried about equal representation.
 - Feels that districts were drawn properly and African Americans are equally represented.
- Specific challenges to the Fourth District (The Central Business District):
 - Demolition of public housing and replacing them with mixed income living.
 - Construction of a downtown arena.
 - Must balance business needs with the needs of some of the central Louisville neighborhoods.
- His constituents are generally excited about merger because they recognize the exciting development that has and will occur.

Ellen Call – Elected Metro Council in November 2002 representing District 26.

- She decided to run for Metro Council because she was excited by the prospects of merger, and had always been involved in campaigns.
 - It was a unique opportunity to run for an office without any incumbents.
- As one of the eleven (minority) Republican metro council members she was surprised at the hostility Republicans first experienced.
 - Some of the holdover Aldermen, had a tough time with the Republicans.
 - Over time the relationship developed, and Republicans and Democrats are getting along

- Major challenges faced:
 - Merger law required council to review all city ordinances within five years.
 - That was a difficult challenge, but one that was fruitful.
 - Smoking ban was also a difficult challenge.
- As for Pros and Cons of merger -- There are not any Cons in her opinion.
 - Economic Development has been simplified because prospective businesses now only have to meet with one mayor.
 - Population demographics now represent that we are the 16th largest city in the country – businesses are more interested in locating here.

Ron Weston – Elected Metro Council in November 2002 representing District 13.

- Was originally opposed to merger.
 - Represents a blue collar working class neighborhood, and they had lots of problems that the county could not take care of (flooding / drainage).
 - Wasn't sure that merger was the answer.
- After being elected – realized that he had access to mayor's office and could get things done for his district that could not be taken care of before.
 - Provides the opportunity for people to get involved in politics that would not otherwise be involved.
 - Face to face representation – council members live in these communities and have contact with constituents.
- Right off the bat the council members realized that they needed to have a good working relationship with the executive branch.
- If there is any downside to merger it is the political maneuvering.
 - Must always remember that we should not let politics get in the way of governing for the people.
- However, merger has allowed one body to solve problems that would otherwise have gone unresolved because of battles between city and county government.

Q&A/Comments:

- Did the framers ever think about council being nonpartisan?
 - They shouldn't be partisan, and it shouldn't have been done that way.
 - Discussions about making this nonpartisan occurred, but those in office at the time insisted that the offices were partisan and the Mayor had to compromise.
- Is metro council the ultimate decision making about land use?
 - Yes. Zoning simply makes recommendations.
- Metro council has budget oversight – were you given any staffing help or expertise to help with this task?
 - Each caucus has a financial expert that helps with the budget process.
 - Ron Weston reminded the audience that it was very unfortunate that the caucuses were unfortunate.
 - The CPA staffers were critical in getting the council members a working understanding of the budget.
- How often does Metro Council meet and what role does Mayor take in meetings?

- Mayor only comes in once a year, and meeting are run by president of council elected by majority.
- Was it necessary to raise taxes?
 - No. Only tax revenue has increased due to property tax valuation increases.
- Would merger work for a small community?
 - What you have to consider are the various different models of government and select the best one.
 - It can work, but you need a strong executive.
 - Need one person speaking on behalf of that community.
- How often does the council meet?
 - Twice a month. Committees take up a lot of council member's time.