

## FRIDAY MORNING KEYNOTE

### THE LOUISVILLE STORY: LESSONS OF REGIONAL STEWARDSHIP

**Joan Riehm**

DEPUTY MAYOR, LOUISVILLE METRO GOVERNMENT, KENTUCKY

**A**FTER a half-century of trying, Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky formally (and finally) merged their governments on Monday, January 6, 2003. Already the economic center of a 23-county, two-state region, Louisville Metro now is the 16<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States. This presentation will explore how a community changes its focus from conflict to cooperation, and confronts the challenges of thinking and acting like a regional city.

**Joan Riehm** is Deputy Mayor of Louisville's new Metro Government. This position caps a three-decade career in communications and government service. She has been a reporter and editor for the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, a news editor for newspapers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Director of Communications for the Kentucky Department of Human Resources. She served as Press Secretary to Louisville Mayor Harvey Sloane in the 1970s, and was Deputy Mayor for ten years under Jerry Abramson when he previously was mayor of the *City* of Louisville. In the private sector, Ms. Riehm has been Manager of Government Relations for Humana Inc., run her own consulting business in public issues management and communication, and served as the first Coordinator for the Regional Leadership Coalition. She is a co-founder of Leadership Kentucky, and founder of the Leadership Louisville Alumni Association. She holds two Master's Degrees, from Northwestern University and the University of Louisville.

#### **Background<sup>1</sup>**

Three years ago, Louisville and Jefferson County residents voted to merge their two governments. It was a decision based largely on the vision of a more streamlined government and the end of acrimonious divisions between the city and the county. Meeting those expectations meant restructuring dozens of offices and departments under the new Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government.

Some of those changes arrived on January 6, 2003, when the new government officially took over. Others, such as the merger of the city and county police departments, are occurring in phases. The merged community now is governed by a directly elected chief executive (mayor) and a 26-member Metro Council elected from districts. This combined structure replaces Louisville's former mayor and aldermen, and Jefferson County's former commissioners and judge-executive.<sup>2</sup>

The merger formally elevated the post of the county attorney, who continues to fulfill local and state obligations while assuming the role of legal advisor to the new Metro Government. The offices of county clerk, sheriff, coroner, and property valuation administrator now submit their annual budgets to the Metro Council for approval, but largely remain unaffected by the merger.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Nancy C. Rodriguez, "Realigned leadership seeks to improve services," Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Monday, 6 January 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The Kentucky Constitution requires that the County Commissioners and Judge-Executive continue; however, because the Metro Council sets their salaries and duties, they will have little to do and be compensated accordingly.

The new Metro Government follows a "strong executive" model, meaning that oversight of day-to-day operations within Louisville Metro falls to the metro mayor. This includes supervising, administering and controlling all departments, implementing ordinances, negotiating collective-bargaining agreements, and preparing the annual budget. The mayor appoints all department and agency heads.

Jerry Abramson, first mayor elected under the merged structure, has organized the executive branch of Louisville Metro under six "cabinets"—public protection, public works and services, neighborhoods, parks and cultural affairs, community development, health and family services, and finance and administration. Oversight of these cabinets is divided among four appointed deputy mayors.

The Metro Council's legislative role includes drafting and adopting laws and ordinances, approving the annual budget and confirming mayoral appointments to select boards and commissions. Each of the 26 council districts represents approximately 26,670 people.