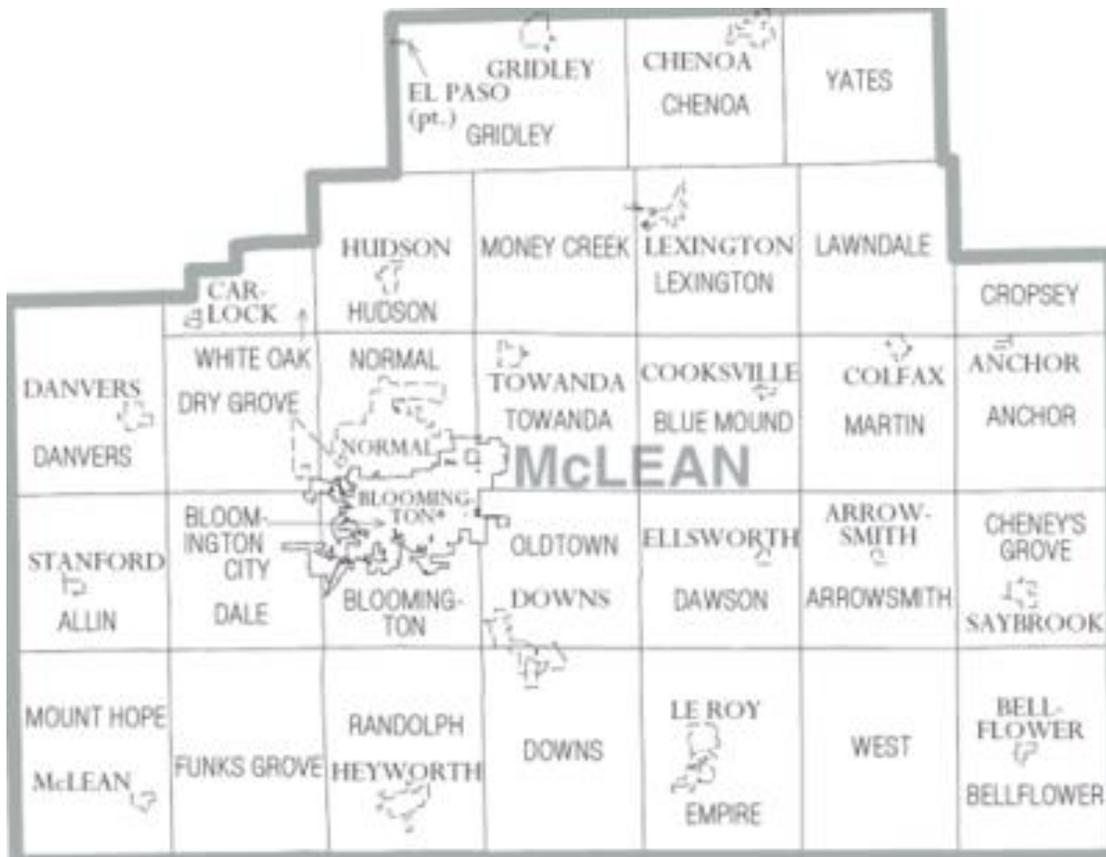




# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MCLEAN COUNTY

## Exploring Government Initiative

August 2017



### **Acknowledgements**

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**EXPLORING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**  
**A Study of the League of Women Voters of McLean County**  
**Executive Summary**

**Introduction and Background**

In January 2015, Lieutenant Governor Sanguinetti formed the 'Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force' to try to find a plan to address a longstanding concern that Illinois has too many units of Government to be efficient and effective. Acting on the belief that better government starts locally, and considering the uniqueness presented by our location, the League of Women Voters of McLean County adopted the Exploring Government Initiative (EGI) as one of their 2015-16 studies.

**Scope and Methods**

The purpose of the LWV MC Exploring Government Initiative was to study local governments in McLean County, IL - their number, functions, structures, and funding - to gain an understanding of the factors that impact these governments' capacity to provide effective services through efficient and economical operations. Special attention was focused on identifying present examples and future opportunities to cooperate, share services, and use best practices.

The primary methods used for this study included a review of other Illinois government efficiency and effectiveness studies and processes; gathering information about government units in McLean County; and face to face, standardized interviews with government officials, employees, and association leaders. A sample of governmental units was selected for study and their officials were invited to participate. Participation was voluntary.

**Findings**

Four other consolidation and efficiency efforts were reviewed, including the above mentioned statewide task force, the Sangamon County Citizens' Efficiency Commission (CEC), DuPage County, and the City of Evanston. Several recommendations emerged from the statewide taskforce. DuPage County has ongoing efforts that bear watching; the Evanston effort should be monitored for longer term results.

McLean County has eighteen types of governments and approximately 200 governmental units based on information from the McLean County Treasurer's office. Eleven government types (61% of the 18) were selected as the focus of this study, including townships, cities, towns, villages, the county and several special districts including library, airport authority, drainage, sanitary, water, fire protection and parks. School districts, unincorporated communities, cemeteries and other water districts were not studied.

A total of 45 interviews were conducted, 35 with government officials and employees, and another 10 interviews and meetings with related organizations and entities. See charts in the report for more specific information.

Several examples of shared services were found at the township level, particularly in the areas of property assessment and general assistance case work. Many more examples of intergovernmental

cooperation were identified across contiguous governmental units such as townships and their population centers (cities, towns, villages) and between the county and townships. These included joint materials purchases, shared rolling stock, and cooperative police and fire protection arrangements.

Quality improvement efforts included consortia, planning commissions and association membership for cities, towns, and townships, as well as special districts such as libraries. These organizations help officials maintain high standards, share training costs, and problem solve.

Several challenges were also identified across the 11 different governmental units studied. Challenges centered around limited citizen interaction and knowledge of government services, limited media coverage of governmental unit efforts, and difficulty finding citizens to stand for elections or be appointed to various governing boards. Lastly, maintaining services in an environment of declining or unstable state funds and declining population was a challenge mentioned by many township and county officials, and special district representatives.

## **Recommendations**

The challenges of declining rural population and property valuation, leading to lower revenues, along with a decline in finding people to serve in government unit volunteer and official capacity, may create more of a risk to service delivery and quality than inefficiency, or 'waste' in the delivery of those services. Officials and personnel interviewed in this study consistently shared their interest in and efforts to be wise stewards of the funding they received. Voluntary consolidation of Townships or Special Districts may provide a way to address the trend of declining resources and leadership.

Questions remain about whether an independent, comprehensive review of each government unit would be necessary for a thorough assessment of effectiveness and efficiency, or if other methods could be just as productive. For example, state or local grants to governmental units to conduct their own self-study process could be tried. Perhaps an effort could be conducted through an association or a university, or developing a commission, as Sangamon County has done.

Study leaders recommend that the Illinois League (LWVIL) investigate eliminating elections for property assessors, and instead rely upon township boards to contract directly with qualified people.

As was discovered by the CEC in Sangamon County and in several local planning groups, it is far easier and perhaps more productive to use informal agreements to share service providers than to make structural changes to the authority of existing governmental units or taxing bodies.

A comparison of our findings to the DuPage county approach/model may be a good next step for additional study in resource sharing.

Study leaders recommend that government officials continue to facilitate cross-government problem solving, such as planning commissions, councils, consortia, and the use of contracted providers. While these methods beg the question about whether the current system can remain sufficiently funded to deliver and/or purchase the services the unit is responsible for, they do create a forum to be creative and resourceful in the meantime.

# Exploring Government Initiative Report

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**EXPLORING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**  
**A Study of the League of Women Voters of McLean County**  
**Report August 2017**

**INTRODUCTION**

The League of Women Voters of McLean County, IL is one of the oldest, largest and consistently active Leagues in downstate Illinois. As a nonpartisan political organization, the local League has a long history of conducting systematic local studies and supporting initiatives that encourage stronger communities and better government via citizen engagement. (1)

The League's purpose in all its studies is to first learn about and understand an issue more fully and then educate its members on study results. Often the next step includes a member presentation and dialogue about whether we need to take a position on a given issue. Member consensus on a position is required before formal community education can commence.

At the May 2015 annual meeting the League of Women Voters of McLean County adopted the Exploring Government Initiative as its study for 2015-16, expecting it to take more than a year. This report summarizes the initiative, which was to study local governments in McLean County - their number, functions, structures, and funding - and gain an understanding of the factors that impact these governments' capacity to provide efficient and effective services.

**BACKGROUND**

Several sources and circumstances provided the stimulus for this study, not the least of which is that Illinois has 7000 governmental units, more than any other state, including 1,431 township governments, the third highest in the nation. (2) The record numbers of governmental units have been of interest to state legislators for a long time, but became of particular interest in the current administration.

In February 2015, Lieutenant' Governor Sanguinetti formed the 'Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force' to look for efficiencies. There were many recommendations in the report. While it is unclear if any of the recommendations will be enacted, there were also 15 unfunded mandate recommendations. Many of the recommendations would require legislative changes. (3)

In June of 2015 the delegates to the Illinois State Convention of the League of Women Voters voted to expand the LWVIL position on County Government Structure by concurring with a New York LWV position regarding the consolidation of governmental units and sharing of major governmental services. (4) The position, in short, sets standards and criteria to be used to assess any proposal for consolidation and sharing to ensure that there is transparency in the process, adequate citizen input, maintained service level and quality, long-view consideration in cost savings, and fairness to employees. Additionally, the LWVIL supports a process of state funded grants to local governments to study the feasibility of any consolidation or cost sharing agreement.

Our own League's interest, along with the above position from the LWVIL, served to focus this initiative and create the opportunity to practice the belief that better government starts locally, close to home, and considers the unique factors presented by our location. Over the summer of 2015 the study chair and team leaders learned that McLean County, IL has 31 townships, most of them established as the area's first governments in the late 1800s. Today, townships are only one example of about 18 types of governmental units in the county. Study leaders began to learn about the reasons we have so many

governments in Illinois. Part of the answer is expedience. Township government has three primary functions defined in state law: road maintenance, property tax assessment, and general assistance. While not limited to those functions, there is a ceiling on how much a township can levy for public services. As citizens needs for fire protection, police, libraries, water service, recreation, etc. developed, special governmental units were sometimes formed to fund those specific needs. In this way, Townships did not have to repeatedly seek to raise the ceiling on spending, and frugal citizens knew what services they were paying for each time a special district referendum was placed before them. As examples, today we have twenty Drainage and fifteen Fire Protection Districts in the County.

McLean County is geographically the largest in Illinois, with 1186 square miles. As such, there are 1520 miles of township roads and another 368 miles of county roads to maintain. The county population of 174,647 (2013) has, for many years, been migrating away from townships and villages and into the cities, leaving townships with fewer tax dollars available to deliver services. (5)

Efforts have been made over the years to allow for the reduction of the number of other independent governmental units, including the 1970 Illinois State constitution, which allows local governments to make changes by referendum. However, the number of governmental units have continued to increase rather than decrease.

## **EGI SCOPE**

The purpose of the LWV MC Exploring Government Initiative was to study local governments in McLean County, IL - their number, functions, structures, and funding - to gain an understanding of the factors that impact these governments' capacity to provide effective services through efficient and economical operations. The scope included a review of similar efforts in Illinois in order to use their findings to explore aspects and potential benefits of the current government structure. Special attention was focused on existing examples and future opportunities to cooperate, share services, and use best practices found through participation in local, state and national associations, consortia and organizations.

While this study explored the system of governments in McLean County, it was not intended to be a comprehensive review of all governmental units. For example, study leaders determined that the school districts in McLean County had consolidated about as much as geography and busing distances would allow and so were expressly excluded. Nor did this study evaluate the performance of any governmental unit's services. Checks and balances currently exist to insure government service effectiveness through the unit's defined and mandated responsibilities and elected boards. Citizen feedback and regular elections provide additional corrections to the provision of government services.

## **METHODS**

### **Timeline**

#### **2015-2017 Activities**

As stated earlier, the Exploring Government Initiative was adopted in May 2015. Background information was collected over the summer of 2015. Six teams were formed in early fall and interviews were conducted from November 2015 through April 2016. Team leaders met to summarize and synthesize interview notes, and in May 2016 the McLean County LWV held a meeting of all study members to hear the findings and determine next steps. At that time, the group decided to write this report to share ways the government entities have already collaborated and consider other potential recommendations.

## **Overview**

The primary methods used for this study included a review of existing Illinois government efficiency and effectiveness studies and processes, gathering information about government units in McLean County, and face to face interviews with government officials, employees and association leaders.

Interested League members were invited to participate on study interview teams. Team Leaders worked with the study chair to identify government types and areas of exploration and prepare for group interviews with elected officials, unit employees, and association members. Team leaders made all contacts and assured potential participants that their comments were to be confidential, and our reporting would summarize our findings in a general way.

Interview questions were developed through a large group process and then refined by the team leaders into a structured interview format. (Appendix A) Small group interviews were then conducted with unit officials in their work sites if at all possible.

The leadership team also attended meetings of organizations, councils and associations founded to enhance collaboration, communication, and the improvement of service delivery in McLean County.

Notes from all interviews and meetings were summarized by team leaders and presented at a meeting with all study team members to share findings and plan next steps. (6)

## **Governmental Unit Identification**

Units of government in McLean County were identified and verified through several sources: the Regional Planning Commission, the County Treasurer's Office, the Legislator's Guide to Local Government in Illinois, and the McLean County website. However, the State of Illinois has no standardized definition of or method for identifying Local Governmental Units. Depending on differing definitions and purposes, 18 different types and an approximate total of 200 governmental units were identified, with about 150-165 of those generally defined as units that have the authority to levy property taxes. (5) Also see list below in Findings.

## **Sampling**

Governmental units and their officials were selected for participation in the study by stratifying the units within type to insure inclusion of a range of factors including population density and geography, an official's level of experience and tenure, number of staff, and budget size. Since participation in the study was voluntary, if a selected governmental unit official declined an invitation to participate in an interview, we invited the next most similar unit and official within that type. While not a representative sample, this method allowed interviewers to look for commonalities and differences within and across types of units, based on these factors.

## **CONSOLIDATION AND EFFICIENCY EFFORTS ELSEWHERE IN ILLINOIS**

### **Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force**

In February 2015, Lieutenant Governor Sanguinetti formed a task force to look for efficiencies. Members of the Task Force included officials who were working on these efforts in their own counties, and other state level officials. Recommendations included:

- a four-year moratorium on creating new governmental entities
- 12 general consolidation recommendations
- allowing consolidations as in the DuPage County model and

- allowing certain townships to consolidate with their coterminous municipalities via referenda.

While it is unclear if any of the recommendations will be enacted, there were also 15 unfunded mandate recommendations. Many of the recommendations would require legislative changes. (3)

**Citizens’ Efficiency Commission (CEC), Sangamon County, IL**

In 2010 the Sangamon County Board put an initiative on the ballot to create the Citizens’ Efficiency Commission. Voters passed this initiative by a 60% majority. Consisting of 23 members, no elected or appointed officials were permitted to participate. Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission staff provided support for the initial effort. This initial Commission studied Indianapolis’s unification under a “metro-form” of government plus several high priority issues in Sangamon County.

The CEC issued a report in 2014 with the key finding that consolidations and mergers are **not** the only ways to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. In fact, consolidation can be harder and more costly than activities such as communication, cooperation, and collaboration. (7)

CEC Phase I Chair, Karen Hasara, is a former State Representative and Senator, and two-term mayor of Springfield. She met with our EGI leadership and shared that Sangamon County has the same number of government entities today as when they started. However, just this effort by the CEC has resulted in more cooperation. Some results:

- The Regional Leadership Council (Mayors and Village Presidents) was created.
- The establishment of the Fire Protection District Trustees Association
- The Road Commissioner’s informal association

Further, they have learned there is need to be sensitive to the positions of the entities they are studying in order to get buy in. The CEC had expected that significant structural consolidations would be recommended. They found instead that small cultural changes can achieve as much as consolidations and mergers. Voters also passed a Phase II of the Commission, which is currently active and now consists of nine members.

The Sangamon County CEC provides a good example of the potential for an efficiency/effectiveness effort. They did extensive research, highlighted areas that warrant further study or action, and provided impetus for those affected to come together for dialogue and cooperation. The CEC’s involvement has been critical in supporting and maintaining this interaction, especially with participants potentially changing each election cycle. They have found that a future view, knowledgeable/engaged people, and strong association with governmental entities who have implementation authority are essential if results are to be achieved.

**DuPage County, IL**

Under the direction of county board chair Dan Cronin, DuPage County has studied 24 agencies with the goal of achieving efficiency and effectiveness. They have been able to hire staff to assist with the process. By May of 2016, 13 entities had been dissolved or consolidated. Of these, 4 were consolidations. Note: see above Lieutenant Governor’s Task Force recommendation to expand DuPage consolidation program to all 102 Illinois counties. (8)

## **Evanston, IL**

In 2014, the City of Evanston eliminated its coterminous township, which handled general assistance, and maintained a working relationship with the county property assessor's office. (Roads were already handled by the city.) Lacking any clear path to elimination, city officials held an advisory referendum, pursued state legislation specifically for this one elimination, and then held a binding referendum. This was a significant and time-consuming effort. Savings are apparently about \$167,000 yearly out of a total township budget of \$1.3 million or about 10%. Much of the savings was due to moving the offices into an existing city building, using city IT support, etc. Some savings came from reducing personnel who assist taxpayers in interacting with the County Assessor's office, where all actual assessing is done. (9)

## **STUDY FINDINGS**

### **Governmental Units**

We know that Illinois has more local governments than any other state but exact numbers are difficult to determine. For instance, two agencies tally special districts, a form of government, in Illinois: the Department of Revenue and the Office of the Comptroller. These two agencies use different methodology for determining numbers of special districts because they use the data for different purposes. And, the U.S. Census Bureau reports even higher numbers because they also include districts such as housing authorities, public housing commissions, interstate roads and bridge commissions, and other units which lack the authority to levy property taxes.

Our League study committee had difficulty establishing an exact count of units of local government in McLean County. The McLean County Treasurer's office told us there were 17 TIF (Tax Increment Finance) Districts, 18 Drainage Districts and 165 taxing bodies in McLean County as of 2015. Simply stated, one could conclude there are about 200 local governments in McLean County. However, TIFs are not taxing bodies even though they have a governing board and are locally controlled.

Our conclusion is that the number of local governments in McLean County depends a great deal on the definition of local government one is using when doing the count.

Eighteen types of governments and approximately 200 governmental units and additional associations were identified. There were no significant changes in the number of governmental units between 2003 and 2016. A total of 45 interviews were conducted, 35 with government officials and employees, and another 10 interviews and meetings with related organizations and entities. See table in this section for more specific information.

The study included 11 of the 18 governmental types, with an emphasis on townships, towns, villages, cities and the county. Districts with responsibilities related to water and sanitation were studied together, but it was determined their functions were distinct and unique, revealing little if any overlap among them. One special park district was interviewed because it is made up of two supporting townships. A single interview with a fire protection district helped us learn more about their special challenges.

## McLean County Governmental Units with Taxing Authority, 2016

	Type	2016	In Study
1	School Districts	8	0
2	Cities and Towns	5	4*
3	Villages	16	4*
4	Unincorporated communities	14	0
5	Townships	31	9
6	Airport Authorities	1	1
7	Drainage Districts	18	2**
8	Cemetery Maintenance Districts	1	0
9	Fire Protection Districts	19	1
10	Library Districts	15	3
11	Multi-Township Assessment Districts	7	0
12	Park Districts	7	1
13	Sanitary Districts	1	1
14	Soil and Water Conservation Districts	1	1
15	Street Lighting Districts	1	0
16	Water Authorities	6	1
17	Water Service Districts	3	0
18	County Government	1	1 *** (7)
	Total	155	35

\*Mayors and key senior employees

\*\*Plus one attorney for multiple drainage districts

\*\*\*7 interviews conducted with county government key employees and elected officials

### Interviews with Representatives - Governmental Units

Interviewers collected basic information about the purpose of the specific type of governmental unit studied, its structure, and funding. Details of that information can be found in the notes from the May 10, 2016 meeting (6).

Interviewers did not find any examples of consolidation. However, they did find many examples of cooperation, coordination, and cost and service sharing that are summarized below. Also listed are the challenges faced and service improvement ideas shared by officials.

#### Shared Services

- Bloomington-Normal Public Transit (without forming a separate taxing district)
- Mt. Hope Funks Grove Park District (two townships voted to form one park district)
- McLean County has 7 Multi-township Assessment Districts covering 18 of the 31 Townships

Intergovernmental Cooperation (Formal and Informal) for Coordination and Service Sharing (including independent contracts with a single service provider)

*Townships*

- Two of the largest townships work together to provide workfare opportunities for their General Assistance recipients.

*County and Township*

- The county provides support to the township assessors through a coordinated system.
- County Highway department supports several townships with equipment for special projects, joint purchase of salt, and engineering work for larger projects.

*Village, City or Town, and Township*

- One city provides IT services, grounds maintenance, etc. for its geographically contiguous township.
- One village police department also patrols the township.
- One village shares equipment with their township.
- One township has opened its senior center membership to all residents of the county.
- A township, village police department, and fire district all purchase fuel together.
- A village picks up brush and then the township grinds it up.
- A village and township share costs for a siren alert system, snow cleaning, and ditch digging.

*Villages, Towns, and Cities*

- Coordinated village ordinances with neighboring villages to make enforcement easier (Although this endeavor has not been completed, it shows a creative approach.)
- Shared police services
- Special fire district skills; one covers technical rescues and another hazardous material
- Animal Control
- County Jail
- Ambulance locator
- Recreation, including Rt. 66 Bikeway, Constitution Trail, ball fields, shared senior and youth services

*Library Districts*

- RAILS: Reaching Across Libraries System. This is a consortium that most of the library districts belong to which provides inter-library loans and group discounts on library purchases, talking books, grant opportunities.

*Fire Protection Districts*

- Mutual aid across fire districts is common

Quality Improvement, Effective Provision of Services

- County administrator facilitates service coordination discussions, such as emergency management systems in western McLean County.
- Assessors have state mandated training requirements, intended to assure equitable valuations of property.

- Seven assessors handle the property valuation for 29 townships.
- The Chief Assessment Officer, who is appointed by the County Board, manages an office with 8 employees who oversee the assessment process. This includes working with the assessors, notifying owners of their valuations, maintaining a countywide name/address database, administering homestead exemptions, organizing an annual meeting of assessors to highlight changes in the law, and working with the County Board of Review.
- Twenty three of 31 Townships' General Assistance services are provided by one case worker.
- The McLean County Elected Official Association, comprised primarily of elected township officials, meets 4 times a year to share ideas and educate themselves in specific areas.
- RAILS: Reaching Across Libraries System consortium provides professional development opportunities for staff and assistance with building and maintaining standards, processes and procedures.
- Library utilization is up and there is more programming for all ages through the library districts. As schools have consolidated their buildings, some communities no longer have a school building to serve as a community 'center.' It is possible that the libraries are now serving that purpose.
- Joint firefighter training is often conducted for multiple districts.

## Challenges

### *General*

- Intergovernmental Agreements that are well-designed and have a mechanism to be kept current
- The willingness to combine services can be highly dependent upon the preferences of office holders.
- Communicating with citizens that officials are being fiscally responsible and are continuously finding ways to conserve and share resources
- Limited media coverage of local government activities. Citizens have a difficult time becoming informed.
- Getting people to serve on elected or appointed boards; lots of vacancies in special districts
- Loss of state funding for projects
- Finances in general: having enough money to maintain the buildings owned by any given governmental unit
- Reduction in tax value of homes in rural areas
- When business growth stalls or decreases, vitality in community and tax revenues decline

### *Economic Development and Regional Planning Perspectives*

- Competition between units when cooperation would build the whole county
- Building trust in government
- Aligning processes among local governments
- More cooperation and less overlap among not-for-profits

### *Townships*

- Elections for Property Assessors. Each township must provide property assessments. If no qualified person stands for election, township boards must contract directly with a qualified individual to provide assessment services. Many townships have joined Multi-Township

Assessment Districts (MTADs) to meet their property assessment requirements. Seven MTADs have been formed, which handle eighteen townships. In McLean County, the thirty-one townships are served by only nine assessors.

- Annexation of land by the City of Bloomington, reducing funds for other townships. In those cases, the land automatically moves out of the current township into the City of Bloomington Township. And outward expansion of Bloomington-Normal can mean higher user volume for services such as libraries in nearby outlying areas. However, the tax base isn't enlarged for those smaller units.
- Prevailing wage requirements for even the smallest of projects/jobs, resulting in significant paperwork and expense
- Motor fuel tax revenue declining
- Cost of road maintenance and repair going up
- Declining population

#### *Villages, Towns and Cities*

- Communication with the public; very little two-way communication
- Online communication; keeping websites current
- Water/sewer issues with EPA requiring very expensive improvements
- Attracting residents if no school building there
- Public complacency

#### *Fire Protection Districts*

- Funding
- Getting enough volunteers

#### *Library Districts*

- Annexation of land and taking tax revenues away
- Loss of state funding
- Lack of cooperation from local police and village in parking and loitering issues

#### *Water Districts*

- Soil and Water Conservation District - decreasing funding from the State and USDA (Federal)
- Sanitary District – maintaining clean drinking water sources with private Lake Bloomington sewage, septic and filtering systems
- Drainage districts - most district drainage tile was laid in the 1930's and landowners will be assessed for replacement costs as the tiles collapse.

#### **Interviews with Representatives and Observation of Meetings - Organizations and Associations**

In addition to studying governmental units, interviewers took the opportunity to meet with representatives of various organizations and associations, and to observe these groups in action. Significant cooperation and collaboration of a formal or informal nature were found here.

#### Interviews

McLean County Chamber of Commerce  
McLean County Regional Planning Commission  
Multi-Township Case Worker  
Economic Development Council (EDC)

Connect Transit (B-N Public Transit)  
Sangamon County Citizens' Commission (CEC) (Observation as well)

Observations

Bloomington-Normal Intergovernmental Staff Meeting  
McLean County Mayors' Association Meeting

Opportunities for enhanced quality in service provision, cost sharing and coordination

- BN Advantage, a multi government and organization effort which has developed five task forces, engaging hundreds of people around the following themes: quality of life, workforce development, marketing/communication, entrepreneurship, metrics.
- Regional Planning Commission (RPC), an eleven-member group with appointed representatives from county, towns, cities, airport, and water governmental units to work on long range planning for the community. Currently, only our transit study is regional (due to federal requirements) but many other aspects of community planning can be approached regionally.
- Intergovernmental Staff Meeting, a twenty-two-member group coordinated by the RPC and comprised of department heads from Parks and Recreation, Highway, Public Works, and Zoning who discuss issues and come to agreements in an informal collaborative way.
- McLean County Mayor's Association, comprised of 22 Mayors, plus sponsors: Nicor, Chamber of Commerce, Illinois Farm Bureau, McLean County Board and a local attorney. This organization has the potential to identify and encourage more cooperation among its members.
- Illinois Municipal League, providing an annual conference, free workshops, training, legislative tracking/position papers/lobbying/legal bulletins.
- U.S. Conference of Mayors
- University City Task Force and Association provides opportunities for Illinois State University and the Town of Normal to learn from similar communities

**LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Participation in the study was voluntary. A number of officials declined to be interviewed.

The League of Women Voters of McLean County had no official authority to conduct a comprehensive exploration and analysis for the purposes of finding opportunities for collaboration and possible consolidation, as is the case for the Sangamon County Citizen's Effectiveness Council, and that may have limited the number of government officials willing to be interviewed. Referenda or appointment of a commission may be needed for a more complete picture of the opportunities for consolidation and cooperation.

Study leaders and team members were volunteers with limited time. Due to this and the reasons stated above, the study was not a comprehensive review of all governmental units. The Lieutenant Governor's task force was staffed and funded as is the Sangamon County CEC. Grants for a purpose like this study might allow for contracted staff to take a more comprehensive approach.

## **ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The EGI Study findings, though limited, challenge the popular assumption that a large number of units of government make the system or any one unit inherently inefficient or ineffective. A better understanding is needed about when an economy of scale in service provision is found and when it is not found.

For example, by hiring skilled providers McLean county townships have largely consolidated township property assessor services, as well as general assistance case work. For road maintenance, the converse may be true. Several township supervisors and county employees indicated that given the large number of miles of roads in the county, the current system of maintaining roads at the township level seems to be effective and cost efficient. Although buying materials in bulk and having a system to borrow equipment are examples of resource sharing found through this study, centralizing road maintenance to the county would require hiring full time staff at a cost far beyond what the townships currently pay for the same services being delivered through local contracts. Further study is needed to verify this suggestion. Skills, geography, changing technologies, and total funds available matter when attempting to create efficiency without losing effectiveness.

The challenges of declining rural population and property valuation, leading to lower revenues, along with a decline in finding people to serve in government units in a volunteer or official capacity may create more of a risk to service delivery and quality than inefficiency (waste) in the delivery of those services. Officials and personnel interviewed in this study consistently shared their interest in being wise stewards of the funding they received. Voluntary consolidation of Townships or Special Districts may provide a way to address this trend of declining resources and leadership. However, mere consolidation of townships may not lead to optimal effectiveness/efficiency.

Based on the above analysis, study leaders recommend that the Illinois League (LWVIL) investigate eliminating elections for property assessors and rely instead upon township boards to contract directly with qualified professional property assessors. This recommendation reflects the current training requirements for assessors, and the high number of assessors who are already contracted directly by township boards rather than elected. In many cases, the assessor is from outside the township and may be able to assess several townships to create a reasonable amount of business. Finally, this recommendation reflects a more efficient and effective operation of government, a LWVIL objective.

Questions remain about whether an independent, comprehensive review of each unit would be necessary for a thorough assessment of effectiveness and efficiency, or if other methods could be just as productive. For example, state or local grants to governmental units to conduct their own self-study process could be tried. Perhaps an effort could be conducted through an association or a university, or developing a commission, as Sangamon County has done.

As was discovered by the CEC in Sangamon County, and in several local planning groups, it is far easier and perhaps more productive to use informal agreements to share service providers than to make structural changes to the authority of existing governmental units and taxing bodies. Over time, the initial promise of a structure like the CEC has faced its own limitations since it has advisory, but not implementing authority.

Study leaders recommend that government officials continue to facilitate cross government problem solving, such as planning commissions, councils and consortiums. Administrative funding and a sponsoring organization may be necessary to make these processes sustainable, however. While these methods beg the question about whether the current government structure can remain sufficiently funded to deliver and/or purchase the services the unit is responsible for, they do create a forum to be creative and resourceful in the meantime.

An exploration of the DuPage county approach/model may be a good next step for additional study. Several possible examples include:

- Resource sharing among neighboring counties – DuPage, for example, closed its youth detention facility after creating an agreement with a neighboring county.
- Sharing its Pictometry Online Cloud based web service with 17 other taxing bodies. Each entity saves as much as \$32,000 yearly in imagery costs.
- Partnering with the Forest Preserve District (FPD) on a shared Adobe Enterprise Agreement saving \$25,000 yearly for the FPD. And, they share GIS (Geographic Information System) services and data, saving \$126,000 yearly for the FPD. Plus, they collaborated on a bid to buy crushed stone, gravel, sand and other aggregate saving the FPD \$29,000 yearly.
- DuPage County Department of Transportation included the City of Aurora in its bidding quantities for traffic signal and street light maintenance in 2015, and is partnering with two other communities to maintain traffic lights via an intergovernmental agreement.
- DuPage County adopted an analytic approach to staffing voting centers, reducing the number of judges required. They also rebid the printing of ballots and other cost savings measures that reportedly had no adverse impact on the voter experience.
- DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference Fire Service Stakeholder sessions explored regional shared services and functional consolidation across fire service providers.

Regarding Evanston’s elimination of their township and folding it into their city, sufficient benefit is not evident here since our City of Bloomington Township (COB) handles general assistance (including emergency assistance and workfare), property assessment, and the Evergreen Memorial Cemetery (which has its own staff and Board). The COB Township already receives many services from the City of Bloomington, such as IT support, grounds maintenance, some employee benefit plans, etc. This limits further opportunities for cost reduction. The township does operate in a separate structure a few blocks from city hall.

In determining whether to support a consolidation/shared services proposal as a way of making government more efficient and effective, study leaders reaffirm the application of the following criteria (as adopted at the 2015 LWVIL Convention). “While it is not necessary that each standard be met, the League recognizes that these standards represent potential benefits of consolidation, leading to more efficient and effective government:

- Will the proposal result in projected cost savings and a positive effect on taxes over the long term;
- Will the proposal either result in an increased quality and/or efficiency of services or, at a minimum, maintain services at existing levels;

- Will the proposal fairly address disparities in employee contracts;
- Will the proposal result in increased social and economic justice;
- Will the proposal result in a reduction in the number of governmental entities?
- As used in this position, consolidation refers to both the process of consolidation and the process of dissolution.”

The LWVIL has created an ad hoc committee to advance advocacy and education relative to the consolidation or elimination of governmental entities and services. Most changes must first occur in state law, and the LWVIL Issues Committee will review, in some cases take a position, and report on legislative activity. The LWVIL has partnered with the statewide organization, *Transform Illinois*, and has signed on as an organization to support SB3, which expands the pilot initiative in three counties allowing county government to take the lead on specific consolidation efforts. This coordinated effort and sharing of resources brings consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness to the individual efforts that have been taking place.

As of this writing the Illinois General Assembly has approved more than a dozen pieces of legislation that have the potential to make local government more efficient. An example is SB3 which, among other provisions allows county governments to propose legislation for the dissolution of a unit of local government, subject to a referendum. Members of the League of Women Voters throughout Illinois will be keeping a close watch on local governments’ activities regarding these new legislative initiatives.

Presentation of this analysis to organizations positioned to continue the exploration and discussion with those most directly affected could improve efficiency and effectiveness of our local government.

**EXPLORING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE  
References**

1. Link to other LWVMC studies: [info@lwvmclean.org](mailto:info@lwvmclean.org)
2. Sources for identification of Governmental Units in Illinois:
  - McLean County Planning Commission: [www.mcplan.org](http://www.mcplan.org)
  - McLean County Board and McLean County Treasurer's office
  - Legislator's Guide to Local Government in Illinois:  
[www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/specialdistricts.pdf](http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/specialdistricts.pdf)
3. Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force:  
<http://www.illinois.gov/lrg/issues/localgovernments/Pages/defaults.aspx>
4. LWV IL position on government structure: [www.lwvil.org/county-government-structure.html](http://www.lwvil.org/county-government-structure.html)
5. McLean county governmental unit data: [www.mcplan.org](http://www.mcplan.org)
6. LWV MVC Exploring Government Initiative May 10, 2016 Meeting Notes – Available upon request  
to: [info@lwvmclean.org](mailto:info@lwvmclean.org)
7. Sangamon County Citizen's Efficiency Commission:  
<http://co.sangamon.il.us/departments/a-c/citizens-efficiency-commission>
8. DuPage County Consolidation plan:  
<http://www.dupageco.org/CountyBoard/Chairman/36740/>
9. Evanston, IL City and Township consolidation information:  
<http://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-manager/property-tax-assessment/>
- Additional information on local government financial statements:  
Illinois Comptroller Warehouse <http://warehouse.illinoiscomptroller.com>

## APPENDIX A

### EXPLORING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

#### Questions for Officials of Special Districts, Townships, Etc.

##### **Background**

The League of Women Voters of McLean County is undertaking a study of our local governments with a special interest in how those can be as effective and efficient as possible. We are currently gathering facts, interviewing local officials, etc. to learn about this topic. Based on what we find, we may (or may not) eventually take a position on the topic. But, today we are here to learn from you and your first-hand experiences.

##### **General**

How long have you served in this post?

What is the most important function of your governmental entity?

What are the other functions/services of your entity?

##### **Governance**

Are you yourself elected or appointed?

Are you governed by a board or other overseer? Who selects those persons?

What are the key decisions that must be made in this entity?

Who makes those decisions?

Do you have any difficulty getting citizens to serve on any boards or commissions – either elected or appointed?

##### **Finances**

What is your annual budget? Does it fluctuate much from year to year?

How many full-time and part-time employees do you have? What is the yearly budget for personnel, including benefits?

What comprises the bulk of other major expenditures each year?

Revenue sources:

What are they: How large is each (approximate % is fine)

Are each of these sources stable from year to year?

Are any of the revenues expressly dedicated to a specific activity (example: often a grant is limited to a specific activity rather than the general functions of the unit).

**Overall**

What are the greatest strengths of this entity?

What are the biggest problems this entity faces – now and in the years ahead?

Are any particular state laws or regulations especially burdensome for this entity? How so?

Do you currently have any intergovernmental agreements – formal or informal? Are they successful? Do you believe that there are opportunities to cooperate more effectively with other governmental units?

Ideas to make this entity more effective (i.e., better provide appropriate services)? Please include any short term or longer term ideas, including those that may require changes beyond your individual entity.

Ideas to make this entity more efficient?

How often do citizens contact you with questions or suggestions?

What do you wish the public understood about your entity?

Impact of state budgetary problems on your governmental entity?

Anything else we ought to know?

**Other job-specific items:**

**For any elected township officials:** Are you a member of the McLean County Elected Officials (townships) Association? What do you see as the role of this group?

**For any mayor or village president:** Are you a member of the McLean County Mayor’s Association? What do you see as the role of this group?

**For any Fire District official:** How many of what size fire trucks do you have, how old are they, what are you budgeting for truck replacement in the next 5 years? How many homes and what is the population of the area for which you provide fire protection? (Note: you can usually get population from Warehouse)