

**Hamilton County Government Reform Task Force  
Meeting Summary  
July 13, 2010**

Conference Room 607B  
Hamilton County Administration Building  
138 East Court Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio

Task Force Members Present: Margaret Cook, Cathy Doyle, Kevin Flynn, Connie Hinitz, Mark Quarry, Elizabeth Robinson, Rosemarie Sturgill, Stephen Taylor, Stephen Wessels

Task Force Members Absent: Marilyn DeCourcy, David Krings, Nikki Johnson, Jim O'Reilly, Lamont Taylor

Invited Guests: Tim Burke, Hamilton County Democratic Party; Andrea Hatten, Hamilton County Coroner's Office; Alex Triantafilou, Hamilton County Republican Party

Hamilton County: Patrick Thompson, Jeff Aluotto, Christian Sigman, Jenna Skop

Task Force Facilitators: Amy Paul, Jacquelyn McCray

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:08 p.m. by M. Cook who welcomed those in attendance.

### **Discussion with Hamilton County Officials**

Tim Burke, Andrea Hatten and Alex Triantafilou each addressed members of the Task Force to discuss county government operations, provide input concerning alternative county government structure and operation, and answer questions from Task Force members. Andrea Hatten attended the meeting at the request of Dr. Odell Owens, who was unavailable for the meeting.

The comments made by Tim Burke and Coroner's Office presentation are included as Attachments A and B, respectively.

### **Minutes of July 1, 2010**

Members of the Task Force were asked to review the meeting summary from July 1, 2010. There were no corrections.

### **Old Business**

There was no old business.

### **New Business**

M. Cook directed Task Force members to an email of suggested reforms submitted by a Hamilton County resident. After reviewing the list of 15 items, Task Force members noted the need to clearly describe the role and charge of the group in their report that will become a public document. Specifically mentioned was the fact that metro government and court reforms were not considered by the Task Force as part of the reform initiative.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

## ATTACHMENT A

### STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION ON COUNTY REFORM July 13, 2010

Good Afternoon. My name is Tim Burke. I understand that I have been invited to offer some comments today because I am Chair of a political party. I should make it clear from the outset that my comments today are my own observations. They cannot be accurately attributed to anyone, not any elected official nor candidate nor party activist, other than myself.

In my professional capacity as an attorney, I spend more than half of my time, one way or another, involved in the government decision-making process. I have represented the Village of Lockland as its Solicitor for almost 30 years and Evendale for the past six. I have represented many other units of local government on specific projects and I've represented clients in front of county and local government bodies and, on occasion, have sued local governments. So I think I have a pretty good sense of how decisions get made – both good ones and bad ones.

I am a Democrat with a big “D.” I believe in government. I particularly believe in a government that is strong enough to help those who need the assistance of government the most. I am a Democrat with a small “d.” I believe in democracy. I trust the electorate to be wise enough as the whole to elect good leaders. I don't always agree with their choices, but I believe in their right to make those choices.

For the four decades that I have been involved in the political process in Greater Cincinnati, almost as much has been said about reforming County government and as many ideas offered as words have been said and ideas offered about changing how we elect members of Cincinnati City Council. While neither has produced results, I believe that the discussions have been and will continue to be valuable.

I think there is a strong case to be made to encourage local governments to continue to find ways to share in the delivery of governmental services. Metropolitan Sewer District, Cincinnati Water Works, County Air Pollution Control, Joint Fire Districts and Mutual Aid Agreements are all examples. None are perfect, but they are better than the expense of the continued balkanization of services. I don't believe the case has been made, either in my mind or in the minds of the majority of the electorate, that Hamilton County should do away with its independently elected officials provided for in the general provisions of the Ohio Revised Code.

Three decades ago, Summit County adopted the first, and until very recently only, Charter form of county government in a large Ohio county. Many believed that form of county government would spread as quickly as the City Manager form of government did in municipalities earlier in the last century. Obviously, that has not been the case.

Cuyahoga County voters only found it necessary to do so when the impression became that the County was filled with corruption [though I would observe that thus far there have been few indictments and even fewer convictions]. Yet, Cuyahoga voters obviously believed that the only way to solve the problem was to totally clean house and start over with a completely new system.

Whether Summit County's charter form of government has, in its 30 years of existence, proven to be a better system of government than Hamilton County's, is at best subject of fair debate. Certainly there is no ability today to objectively demonstrate that Cuyahoga County's new form will produce better government when all that can be safely said about it is that it will take from office those about whom probable indictments have been speculated and some of those over whom there has been no taint of corruption at all.

We have been blessed in the City of Cincinnati and in Hamilton County with elected leaders who have not been guilty or accused of padding their own pockets. When scandal has erupted, voters in Hamilton County have demonstrated the ability to throw the rascals out. That was the case in the wake of the FOJ (Friend of Joe) scandal which helped bring into office Dusty Rhodes, at that time the only Democrat outside of a judge or two holding a county-wide elected office.

The Open Meetings Law, Public Records Law, Campaign Finance Regulations and the attention of the media has all made government far more transparent than it has ever been. The public has the ability to know and to make decisions based on that knowledge.

Today, Hamilton County benefits from the fact that we have a competitive two-party system. I do not believe that the 2008 elections signified that Hamilton County will be perpetually blue, far from it. I will work hard to ensure we retain a Democratic majority on the County Commission, but I'd be foolish to guarantee that outcome. My hesitancy has nothing to do with the merits of the candidates. It is just a recognition of Hamilton County's competitiveness.

One of the problems that existed in Cuyahoga County was the lack of effective two-party competition and the County Democrat Party's own internal lack of discipline that left the voters completely dissatisfied and convinced that change was needed. That is not the case here.

Our independently elected County officials bring with them a system of checks and balances that has significant benefit. From time to time, it no doubt complicates the government decision-making process, but I don't believe that those complications have created the budget difficulties we face today and certainly not the stadium debt. Rather, those were problems created by bad decisions made years ago that are now coming home to roost.

I do believe that there is a role for professional public administrators and they ought to be at the heart of managing how our governments function. We have a professional public administrator as the County Administrator and that should continue. The case has yet to be made that we need a directly elected County Executive and certainly I can't say that we need such a position at the expense of an independent County Sheriff, Treasurer, Recorder, Engineer, Coroner or Prosecutor. And I certainly would not trade a directly-elected County Auditor serving the role expected of an independent auditor for the elected Super Executive.

I am also very aware of the political reality that we have almost 50 different independent political jurisdictions in Hamilton County, and more than that if you count the school districts. I just don't think that the proud residents of Colerain Township or the Village of Addyston are prepared to give their local independence up to a super county government. They are just not there, at least no yet. I believe that it is far more beneficial to continue to work with those local governments to help them identify opportunities to benefit from cooperation with one another and the County and even the central City of Cincinnati on appropriate programs best delivered on a multi-jurisdictional basis.

Politicians make mistakes. So do professional public administrators. So do judges. So do political party chairs. But such mistakes are, in my opinion, best evaluated by the electorate to whom the elected officials are responsible.

I'd be happy to respond to your questions.

Timothy M. Burke

## Hamilton County Coroner's Office

Andrea Hatten, Administrator

### Coroner 101

- Elected Official
- 4 year term
- No term limitations
- ORC 313.02 Qualifications for Coroner

*No person shall be eligible to the office of coroner except a physician who has been licensed to practice as a physician in this state for a period of at least two years..., and who is in good standing in the person's profession...*

### Coroner 101 continued

- Duties of Coroner are statutorily defined in Ohio Revised Code, Section 313
- Core responsibility is to determine cause and manner of death of individuals who dies as a result of criminal or other violent means, by casualty (accident), by suicide, or in any other suspicious or unusual manner
- Statute provides ability to hire pathologists as well as other employees to support this function
- May establish an office, laboratory and morgue
- Maintain records, and make public when requested

### Dr. O'dell Owens



## Hamilton County Coroner's Office and Crime Laboratory



## Coroner's Staff

- 49 employees, plus Coroner
- 40 full time, 9 part time
- 13 investigations/administration
- 4 morgue
- 22 crime laboratory
- 1 facilities manager
- 8 part time night/weekend clerks
- 1 part time questioned document examiner
- Also retain services of 3 professional consultants (forensic anthropologist, odontologist and neuropathologist)

## What do we do? Coroner

- Death investigation is supported by 4 investigators and 4 board certified forensic pathologists/Deputy Coroners
- Death reports are received 24/7/365 with an on-call investigator, deputy coroner and transport team always available
- Reports are received from law enforcement, hospitals, nursing homes, Hospice agencies
- Average 3,500 reports per year with an acceptance rate of 975 per year
- Reportable vs. non-reportable

## What do we do?

- Reportable cases sometimes require scene response (@ 400 per year), while others simple require transport to the office
- Investigators respond to scenes, gather information (medical history/records, police reports, family statements, etc)
- Deputy coroners perform autopsies 7 days per week, with the exception of holidays
- Average 1,000 autopsies per year
- Autopsies generally take 2 hours

## What do we do?

- Sometimes cause and manner are known right away, while others require further toxicological and/or histological analyses or further investigation on the part of LE
- Sign death certificates and issue autopsy reports
- Ancillary duties include testifying in court (civil & criminal) conference with families regarding autopsy findings, speak to civic/community groups, participate in education of police, prosecutors, academic institutions, etc.
- Accredited by NAME and IACME

## What do we do? Crime Lab

- Staff has bachelors and advanced degrees
- Provides forensic services to 82 agencies ranging from smallest of municipality to federal agencies
- Full range of disciplines to include illicit drug analysis, arson/trace evidence, DNA, firearms and questioned documents
- Toxicology section primarily performs work for coroner cases, but also processes OVI and rape cases

## What do we do? Crime Lab

- Process roughly 15,000 cases per year
- Evidence is submitted to lab...assigned to requested section...analysis performed...reports are issued...analysts testify to findings as required
- When backlog is under control, analysts are sometimes called upon to speak to academic institutions, provide training to LE and legal community
- Accredited by ASCLD/LAB

## Misc. Information

- 2010 annual budget of \$3.7 million dollars, plus supplements from the restricted fund (average \$225k per year)
- Over \$200k in active grant funding this year, averages at least that much each year
- \$1.5 million in grant funding received
- Generate @ \$950k per year in general fund revenue, and \$225k in restricted fund revenue