

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

**APPROVED MINUTES OF THE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING HELD**

**STATE OF MINNESOTA)
DODGE COUNTY)**

**COUNTY ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
MANTORVILLE, MN**

2012-18 C.O.W.

The Dodge County Commissioners met in Committee of the Whole September 25, 2012, in the Commissioner's Room at the Dodge County Courthouse Annex, Mantorville, MN, at 9:00 a.m. CDT. Chair Don Gray opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. CDT. Meeting Convened

The Chair acknowledged those present:

Those Present

Members present: Jane Olive District #1
Lyle Tjosaas District #2
David Erickson District #3
Don Gray District #4
David Hanson District #5

Members absent: None

Also present: Jim Elmquist County Administrator
Becky Lubahn Deputy County Clerk
Lisa Kramer Finance Director
Steven Gray Dodge County Resident

County Administrator Jim Elmquist discussed with the Board the land and tax organizational structure of the county.

Land and Tax
Organization
Structure
Discussion

Mr. Elmquist reported that within the Organization Structure section of the strategic plan it states there will be "a consolidated effort between the "natural" partners of Finance, Records, Assessor, and Environmental Services (Planning and Zoning) to potentially create efficiency improvements with shared staffing." With the Recorder's retirement and the position transitioning to appointive along with the pending retirement this year of the County Assessor, meetings of department heads have been held to determine if there is an opportunity for functional consolidation. After presenting three models with affected department heads, one model, the consolidation of Assessor, Recorder, and Finance into one "division" called Land and Tax seemed to rise to the best option.

One model presented included Planning and Zoning consolidated with the Recorder and Assessor's Department creating a Land Management Department. After discussion, it was determined that with the departments connections to Feedlots and Water Quality, it would make for a difficult transition out of Environmental Quality and into another area. However, in the Land and Tax scenario, the departments have a natural connection to each other as described in the Finance Director's memorandum to the Board and while the windows in the departments wouldn't change, all three departments would report within one unit with the desire of creating more natural work flows within and between departments.

Included in the Board packet was a model departmental structure. It was emphasized that the goal is not just to consolidate for the sake of doing so within the strategic plan. If restructuring is approved by the Board, the next step would be for the three departments to go through a LEAN process defining workflows and determine where functionality between areas is possible. Also, with staff in Finance having the training and capacity to assist with duties in the Recorder's Department, it allows for staffing in those areas to be interchangeable when there are shortages due to trainings or PTO.

Land and Tax
Organization
Structure
Discussion -
Continued

This is not a new idea from a county perspective. Mr. Elmquist has had conversations with a number of counties and counties like Beltrami, Mille Lacs, Goodhue, Olmsted and several metropolitan counties have either consolidated into a Land Records or Land Management structure or are currently working to move in that direction.

Finance Director Lisa Kramer included in the Board packet a letter to the Board indicating that the combination of departments that have a natural affinity was determined to be a strategic goal of Dodge County, and she believes that Finance, Recorder, and Assessor represent this type of opportunity. These three departments represent the land records, valuation and taxation for all of the land in Dodge County. All three departments require a similar base skill-set which makes it easy to envision cross-training staff to assist in any of the three offices. This would make it possible to better staff for busy times. By no means would staff be completely interchangeable, but Ms. Kramer anticipates that there are some base level activities in each office that could be done by cross-trained co-workers giving the core staff time to focus on the more technical work at hand.

The groundwork for this combination/collaboration has been put in place over the last few years. The Assessor's Office and Finance have worked closely to coordinate sending their valuation notices and tax statements together which has resulted in significant savings to the county. Both the Recorder's Office and Assessor's Office perform some Auditor/Treasurer duties (deed transfers and collection of the associated taxes) and are in fact all Deputy Auditor-Treasurers. The Finance Director has worked with the Recorder's Office to resolve issues with the Assessor's Office timely completion of deed transfers and accurate completion of splits. Ms. Kramer has worked with the County Attorney and the Assessor on valuation issues. Specifically valuation of the McNeilus Truck properties as they have moved out of the court stipulated value zone.

Based on these interactions the Finance Director sees further integration of these three departments as formalizing a working relationship that is already happening behind the scenes.

Included in the Board packet was a memo from the County Assessor. The letter stated that with Sue Alberts' recent retirement and the Assessor's pending retirement in December, Dodge County is faced with the responsibility of filling not just one, but two, department head positions within a few months. It is also unique that the two departments are adjacent to one another, share a common workspace, and share certain workload responsibilities, such as legal description and survey verification, creating new parcel descriptions from deeds, processing Certificates of Real Estate Value (CRVs), and researching recorded documents. For these reasons, now would be an opportune time to evaluate the responsibilities and duties of both departments to see if there might be efficiencies to be gained by restructuring the administration of these and other departments.

Mr. Engelstad’s letter indicated that his first thought was “If it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.” But with that caveat, the county recognizes that there is always room for improvement in any endeavor. There are outside consultants who are adept at observing workflow processes, time management, team building, and supervisory management to evaluate where improvements can be made. It was the County Assessor’s opinion that an outside consultant could show where there are duplicated efforts, ineffective processes, job-sharing solutions, available technology enhancements, and opportunities to redirect administrative responsibilities within and between departments. Before structural changes to any departments are seriously considered, Mr. Engelstad would like to see a consultant hired to identify where the best opportunities for improvement are.

The County Assessor’s letter noted that former County Administrator, Dave McKnight asked for thoughts from the department heads in January, 2008 regarding a new structure with most of the departments grouped into divisions. Mr. Engelstad’s thoughts on this have evolved over the past five years to where he can see that this structure might provide some possible improvements in the administration within and over the departments.

The points that the County Assessor wanted to make are:

1. His replacement should probably be hired sooner rather than later. Although it is not always adhered to, Minnesota statutes require that it be filled.
2. The strategic plan recommends looking at possible consolidation of the Recorder’s and Assessor’s offices.
3. It would be nice to see a study done on restructuring the departments to make sure that it is done correctly.

The County Administrator discussed the following models with the Board:

Model 1:



Model 2:



Model 3:



It was noted that the preferred option would be Model 3.

Discussion took place on whether or not it was necessary to hire a consultant to review the county’s options.

The Finance Director commented that a consultant may not be necessary; however the Board may want to look at the processes in each department and see if there are things that can be done differently or more efficiently.

Ms. Kramer commented that she feels this is an opportunity for the county to look at what is being done and possibly find other ways/better ways of collaboration within the three offices.

Land and Tax
Organization
Structure
Discussion -
Continued

Steve Gray stated that from an outsider’s perspective, the county needs a central location for property information that also allows other offices the ability to access the same property information and add notes/comments to property records.

It was noted that some of the processes within the departments have been addressed and improved over the years. The LEAN process could provide input on further streamlining the process within these offices.

The Board ran out of time to further discuss the land and tax organization structure.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9:30 a.m. CDT.

Meeting Adjourned

ATTEST:

DON GRAY
CHAIR, COUNTY BOARD

BECKY LUBAHN
DEPUTY CLERK

DATED: