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**LA CROSSE COUNTY BOARD PROCEEDINGS  
PRE-MEETING PRESENTATION  
AND  
PLANNING MEETING  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2010**

**PRESENTATION on the Property Tax Assessment system (Municipal Assessment versus Sales Data – A Means of Determining Property Tax Equity) – Karl Green**

Chair Doyle introduced our UW Extension Community Development Agent, Assistant Professor Karl Green, who proceeded with a presentation on Municipal Assessment Values versus Sales Data. He put this presentation together because tax bills and increases in property values are confusing and often not understood. He explained that the municipal portion of an individual's property tax is determined by multiplying the assessed value times the municipal mill rate. The municipal mill rate is determined by dividing the total tax levy by the total municipal assessed value. The total municipal assessed value is determined simply by adding together the assessed value of every property in the municipality. Therefore current and accurate assessments on every property are necessary in order for the property tax to be fair. For the purposes of the study, the market value data should only include "arms length" sales, which are primarily residential property sales between unrelated and willing buyers and sellers so they reflect current market conditions, as determined by the Department of Revenue. By dividing the assessed value by the market value, we determine the assessment ratio. Any assessment ratio less than .99 means the property is under assessed. By looking at each individual municipality for each individual year we can determine the average assessment ratio, which represents the total assessed value to the total equalized value. When assessment rolls are out of date, and some property assessments are more out of date than others, it causes inequity of the tax burden. Agent Green illustrated this problem with a series of slides and graphs. In conclusion he made the following observations and raised the following questions:

- If somebody is underpaying, somebody else is overpaying.
- If large variations in the assessed value to sales value is occurring it may mean that the property assessment roll is not updated.
- If assessors aren't adequately updating the property assessment roll there is increased potential for property tax inequity among town property owners.
- With assessors, the town gets what they pay for:
  - Most assessors would agree to maintain better records if they were paid more.
  - Do our town contracts with assessors pay for enough time to maintain an equitable property tax assessment book?
- If there is something broken in the current system, who should fix it?

Agent Green responded to questions and comments from the Board.

Immediately following, the County Board Planning meeting commenced.

**PLANNING MEETING**

The La Crosse County Board of Supervisors Planning Meeting was held on February 8, 2010 in the Administrative Center, Room B410. Chair Doyle called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. The County Clerk, Linda Stone, took attendance. All supervisors were present except as noted:

**DISTRICT - NAME**

1 Richmond, Andrea  
2 Geary Jr., Ralph  
3 Veenstra, Joe  
4 Johnson, Jai  
5 Konkel, Bradley – Excused at 7:30 p.m.  
6 Billings, Jill

**DISTRICT – NAME**

19 Keil, Robert - Excused  
20 Bina, Donald  
21 Manthei, Dennis  
22 Ebert, Ray A. – Excused at 7:00 p.m.  
23 Gamroth, Tammy  
24 Pfaff, Leon - Excused

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Attendance Roll Call, continued

DISTRICT - NAME

- 7 Plesha, Roger
- 8 Freedland, Maureen
- 9 Hampson, Sharon
- 10 Wood, Margaret
- 11 Kader, Audrey
- 12 Flood, Bridget - Excused
- 13 Brockmiller, Bill
- 14 Medinger, John D.
- 15 Mach, Beverly - Excused
- 16 Sebranek, Gerald
- 17 Meyer, Donald
- 18 Johnson, Tara

DISTRICT - NAME

- 25 Schroeder, Jeffrey
- 26 Burke, Vicki
- 27 Pedretti, Marilyn
- 28 Doyle, Steve
- 29 Kruse, Monica L.
- 30 Spiker, Charles
- 31 Fisher, Ann - Excused
- 32 Benrud, Arlene
- 33 Berns, Jim - Present at 6:36 p.m.
- 34 Wehrs, Tina
- 35 Bilskemper, Joe

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**COUNTY BOARD CHAIR – Steve Doyle**

- **Welcome:** Chair Doyle welcomed the members and staff from City Council and the La Crosse School District. Those present were introduced or identified themselves. There were over 20 identified guests in attendance.

**PROCLAMATION: FEBRUARY 2010 PUBLIC HEALTH MONTH**

**WHEREAS**, the La Crosse County Health Department improves the quality of life and health of all 110,000 people in La Crosse County; rich and poor, residents and tourists, young and old; and, **WHEREAS**, the Health Department is made up of 80 full and part time staff from the following professions:

- |                                   |                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Community Health Nurse            | Nutrition Educator     |
| Clerk                             | Sanitarian             |
| Community Health Aide             | Secretary              |
| Emergency Preparedness Specialist | Social Worker          |
| Epidemiologist                    | Supervisor             |
| Health Educator                   | Tobacco Checker        |
| Laboratory Technologist           | Vector Control Monitor |
| Manager                           | Work Assistant         |
| Medical Record Technician         |                        |

**WHEREAS**, the staff of the La Crosse County Health Department assists County residents to live a long and productive life, free of preventable disease and preventable injury through the following services:

Public information to promote health	TB control
Dental sealants/varnish & health promotion	Tattoo piercing inspections
Home Health nursing & therapy	Indoor air quality investigation
Elderly home visits & Home safety visits	Alcohol related violence prevention
Lead poison & radon prevention, case management & training	Wisconsin Well Women program
Animal bite prevention and animal enforcement	Children with Special Health Care Needs
Tobacco related disease prevention & youth tobacco prevention	Foot care and personal care
Women, Infants & Children Nutrition Program & WIC Farmers Market	Medical equipment/Loan closet
Occupational health/injury prevention, nutrition and physical activity	School vision and hearing screening

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Diabetes, Cardiovascular disease, Breast Cancer & Obesity prevention education	Sexually transmitted disease prevention and investigation & HIV counseling & testing
Pregnancy testing, pre-natal care coordination, breastfeeding education and child safety seat program	Child/Adult & Community health assessments & immunizations
Hotel/Lodging inspection, including campgrounds, swimming areas and other recreational areas	Prevention of insect borne disease including lyme, West Nile virus, rabies
Food & water protection through licensing, inspection & testing & food safety education	And a variety of other services

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the La Crosse County Board does hereby proclaim the month of February as Public Health Month and urges all residents to join in recognizing the valuable contribution of Health Department staff dedicated to improving the quality of life and health for La Crosse County residents.

**Motion** by Wood/Hampson to approve passed on a unanimous voice vote with 5 excused – Flood, Mach, Keil, Pfaff and Fisher.

**APPOINTMENT**

**Motion** by Doyle/Ebert to appoint Rick Kyte to the Ethics Board for the remainder of a 3 year term to expire April 30, 2012, to replace Rev. Thomas O'Neill, who has passed away, passed on a unanimous voice vote with 5 excused – Flood, Mach, Keil, Pfaff and Fisher.

**COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

COUNTY COLLABORATION CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

• **Challenging Trends Facing La Crosse County by Steve O'Malley**

Administrator O'Malley began with a brief list of some of the good things that are happening in La Crosse County, such as our comparatively low unemployment rates, development projects that continue even in the tough economic conditions of our country and being named one of the 10 best places to live by US News and World Report. However, we do have some challenging trends emerging that we need to work together to find solutions for. The City of La Crosse is our Metropolitan Core, and what affects the City affects the region because we can only be as strong as our core. The City of La Crosse is the site of almost 70% of the County's jobs; approximately 60% of suburban workers commute to jobs in the City of La Crosse; the City of La Crosse is home to most of the region's essential institutions and employers; La Crosse is the signature City – the region's identity. Our entire region should be concerned about the effect that our sprawling development pattern is having on our core. With a series of graphs and slides Administrator O'Malley pointed out how we encourage suburban sprawl by building and improving roads, building new opportunities for free parking, new schools and other public facilities closer to sprawling developments and proliferating the tax rate disparities among municipalities. With government approval, developers have created a glut of residential lots all across the County. Based on a recent analysis by our Planning and Land Information office there are 2,473 vacant residential lots in the County. If development would continue on the pace of the past 3 years (313 single-family building permits) we would have about 8 years of inventory without a single new lot being created. This glut of vacant lots has affected the basic economics of development. Because the supply is high and the demand is low, values are being pushed down, profits are disappearing and developments are starting to fail. This is not good for the developers, the banks, the lot owners or the government that is finding it difficult and expensive to serve these sprawling residential developments. Growing tax rate disparities among municipalities, growing concentrations of poverty in the urban core, neighborhood deterioration and crimes, increasing investment in infrastructure (such as, but not limited to, roads and schools) and inability to meet the demands for public services are all cyclical trends associated with sprawl. He illustrated how these trends are affecting us with various graphs and slides. The cost of inaction is high; we

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cannot continue to make it financially and socially more attractive to develop in a pattern that is less efficient to serve. It is time for regional leaders to come together to explore innovative solutions to reverse these troubling trends by encouraging investment in the metropolitan core, working together regionally to create an attractive area for economic development and working to be as efficient as we can in the delivery of public services. We need to make sure that investment in our community is a profitable investment that leads to both financial gains and a high quality of life. The presentations to follow will demonstrate three possible solutions:

- Cost containment in the City of La Crosse could work to reduce the tax rate disparity.
- A La Crosse County "Compact" would promote more regional thinking in land use decisions, economic development and revenue sharing.
- A place-based, universal scholarship program would work to balance the tax rate disparity and encourage investment in the metropolitan core.

### • **Reducing Government Services by Karl Green**

UW Extension Community Development Agent, Assistant Professor Karl Green, proceeded with a presentation on reducing the property tax incentive for sprawl through cost containment and reduction. Agent Green addressed the issue of how much expense the City of La Crosse would have to cut to bring their taxes more in line with the surrounding villages and towns so as to minimize the incentive for property owners to settle outside of the city. After a brief explanation of the various components of a property tax bill, he noted that the municipal levy varies from being 7% of a property owner's total bill in the Town of Medary to 45% in the city of La Crosse. He demonstrated that by retaining only police protection, fire protection and what is needed for debt repayment, the city would have to cut costs for all other programs by 51% to bring their mill rate equal to the City of Onalaska and 94% to bring it equal to the Town of Medary. This is likely an unrealistic option. He noted that urban sprawl decreases property values in the City while many of the residents living outside of the City still work in La Crosse and benefit from many of the City's amenities. He also spoke about TIF districts because it is often thought to be a cause of the high mill rate. However, he demonstrated that the City mill rate would only be reduced by 81 cents without the current TIF districts.

In conclusion:

- Cost reduction would require major reductions to see minimal drops in the Mill rate.
- The City of La Crosse cannot reduce taxes through expense reduction adequately enough to eliminate urban sprawl.
- The City's TIF policy is comparable to similar Wisconsin cities, however: When comparing municipal budgets with similar Wisconsin communities, the City leads many categories in cost per department.

### • **Regional Revenue Sharing by Larry Kirch**

Larry Kirch, Director of Planning and Development for the City of La Crosse spoke about a La Crosse County "Compact", an idea for "Acting as One". As we saw in the Challenging Trends report our development pattern is making local government less efficient. One reason for these trends is that our many local municipalities are forced to compete with one another for economic resources (tax base), including higher income residents and businesses. The City of La Crosse is left behind in this competition because it must deal with older housing stock, aging infrastructure and populations that need more services. The economies of communities within the region are increasingly connected as more people live in one community and work in another, so the economies of all the surrounding municipalities are tied to that of the City of La Crosse. At the 2006 County Collaboration Conference David Rusk (author of "*Cities Without Suburbs*") spoke on the following:

- Employer-centered regional schools and employer-assisted housing programs
- Inclusionary zoning for major land use conversions
- Farmland purchase of development rights program

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- Multi-jurisdictional "Compact" combining anti-sprawl land-use planning, unified economic development and tax base sharing

Rusk believes that the only way to attack these problems is for the region to cooperate because these issues affect us all. A La Crosse County "Compact" would address many of the issues that surfaced in the *Challenging Trends* report. In 2005 a La Crosse Metropattern study documented the social and economic separation that exists in the area, looked at the effects of this separation on individual municipalities and the region as a whole and established a basis for discussion on strategies to address these challenges. It studied the tax capacity of each municipality in the County and then used this measure of wealth to identify fiscal inequalities in the metropolitan area. The report suggests, similar to David Rusk's recommendations, that regional tax base sharing would be one way to address inequalities and get us working together as one strong region. "Compact" Case studies have been done in the Twin Cities, Racine County, Dayton Ohio and Denver Colorado. Each had a slightly different approach but all are proving to be successful. National research has shown that overall regional growth rates tended to be greater in the metropolitan areas where the central city economy was strongest, and where someone or some group takes the lead on moving the community forward with a regional perspective. There are many successful models across the country of regions working together for the benefit of all. Kirch hopes we can learn from their success and proposed the question "Where do we start?"

- **Universal Place-Based Scholarship Programs by Jerry Kember**

School District of La Crosse Superintendent Gerald Kember gave a presentation titled "Place-Based Universal Scholarship Programs", which is a potential economic development tool that could be a solution to every challenge just addressed. He also noted that we do have a City, County and School District collaboration; he, the City of La Crosse Mayor and the County Administrator get together quarterly with the leadership from those 3 organizations. Because they tax the same people, they look for ways to reduce taxes, share resources and do better business for the area. He reiterated some of what had been in Administrator O'Malley's presentation and focused on how shifting enrollments around the County have forced them to build new schools when all they're really doing is moving students from one building to another. The end result is that there is a minimal increase in school revenue, but a significant expense to the taxpayers. This solution that he's presenting is about educational attainment. Currently 64% of County residents 25 and older have less than an associate degree. But jobs requiring an associate degree, at minimum, are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. With Place-Based, Universal Scholarships, all students residing in a defined geographic area are eligible; financial need or academic merit are not factors. There are several areas around the country that have adopted this or similar programs. With the aid of slides and graphs he showed how these programs have made college a real possibility for all students, and have been an economic boom for the regions. The Kalamazoo Promise provided full tuition for graduates of the Kalamazoo School District to any school in Michigan, which made college a real possibility for all students. As a result, the taxable value of homes rose more than expected, two-thirds of the scholarship recipients stayed local, their economic development aligned around the vision of an "Education Community" and they experienced improved recruitment and retention of employees through the community's commitment to education. The El Dorado Promise in Arkansas replicated the Kalamazoo Promise and they saw immediate positive effects on the community and public schools as they realized the inseparable link between quality education and the economic vitality of the region when home sales in Union County, AR went up nearly 4% in 2007 despite a 9% decrease statewide. The Pittsburgh Promise in Pennsylvania has just begun so the results have yet to be realized but they are focusing on reversing population and school enrollment declines, increasing high school completion rates and college preparedness and creating a well-prepared workforce and eager community volunteers. In Colorado, the Denver Scholarship Foundation's mission is to inspire and empower students to achieve their post secondary education goals by providing the tools, knowledge and financial resources for success. The

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community leaders and private donors have created a powerful resource for financial assistance and guidance, and are targeting their highest poverty schools. They have created Future Centers for promoting student success during and beyond; the centers focus on preparedness for college, assure they are a good investment and provide application assistance. There are about 12 cities around the country that are currently looking at promise programs and what a difference one could make in their region. There is a "Promise Net" conference he has attended for the past two years to look at what the possibilities might be for La Crosse. A study was conducted by W. E. Upjohn Institute in 2009 on the feasibility of a La Crosse Promise. This study was supported by the City, County, School District and 13 other businesses and organizations. It analyzed the strengths and weaknesses in our region, studied options for a La Crosse program model, the cost of implementation, economic and fiscal impact estimates, identified the cost of inaction and looked at next steps for possible implementation. That study indicated that a successful program in La Crosse should include three components: a universal, place-based scholarship program; Future centers to provide new resources for college preparedness; and integrated community development efforts, providing new housing and employment opportunities for projected growth. Expected outcomes, in one year, would be 845 new residents, 240 new households and 360 new students, increasing to 850 students in 10 years. Other expected outcomes would be a positive fiscal impact on the city and county. Stabilization of the area's tax base would bring new development and increase the value of existing developments. This would mean increased revenues for the schools through the development of new tax base and an increase in state aid. The increased ability to retain a skilled, educated workforce would be a boost to our community image and identity. The scholarships would increase many families' disposable income and thus support greater local retail activity. The expected return on the investment could include the following:

- Create an economic development pull and new job opportunities
- Make college more accessible for all students
- Increase real estate values
- Improve our ability to attract and retain top-level talent for employment
- Reverse challenging economic trends
- Improve the quality of life throughout the region
- Turn around troubled neighborhoods
- Increase the efficiencies of local government
- Raise recognition as an "Education Community"
- Improve vitality and economic condition of the region

Per Dr. Janice Brown, from *"The Power of a Promise"*, "Study after study indicates that an investment in education adds to the quality of our community and the quality of life for all its citizens." Kember's conclusion is that everyone would benefit from a La Crosse Promise.

All presenters responded to questions and comments from the Board and guests from the City and the School District. One response clarified that the scholarships spoken about are primarily funded by donations from businesses and individuals. Several local businesses have taken an interest in this, including realtors. A group is looking to form a La Crosse Promise Foundation, and looking at the community foundation as being a supporting organization. Committees have been developed. There are people in this group from Kwik Trip, Franciscan Skemp, Gundersen Lutheran, LHI and Dairyland Power, both Universities and the Technical College.

Administrator O'Malley is encouraged that so many elected officials came, who didn't have to come to this meeting, that care deeply about this community and are willing to listen. The role of the City and County would be to create a model that makes what is now unattractive, high property taxes and the other challenges discussed, more attractive, so that people of higher and moderate and middle income want to reinvest in this community. It's up to the City and County to band together and be ready with the bankers and the realtors and other investors to be ready for that kind of re-development. The County won't be an investor in the raising of the money or the philanthropy but we need to be ready to

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spearhead and work together with the development community to allow for that kind of re-development. Staff is already working together on economic issues and believes we can be pro-active in looking for solutions. The Future Centers would be the responsibility of the School District, and they would be able to handle that responsibility with increased revenue from increased enrollment. The City and the County can further economic development if they have the new tax base to back it up. A private foundation will handle the scholarship portion, as it obviously cannot be funded with tax dollars. Chair Doyle interjected that the job of the elected officials is to help their constituents who don't live in the City of La Crosse understand what's in it for them. We have to look at the bigger picture. In Wisconsin, our biggest city, Milwaukee, is an economic drain. But in Minnesota the biggest city, Minneapolis, is the economic engine of their state. We want La Crosse to be our Minneapolis, not our Milwaukee. He believes that convincing people that what is good for the City of La Crosse is also good for the Town of Shelby and the Village of Holmen, etc., is what it will take. He agrees that we need to start with the private sector first. City Planner Kirch agreed. The City of La Crosse cannot sell this idea. Until we can get everybody talking together there will continue to be annexation battles. It starts with the leadership; staff alone cannot create the future. Administrator O'Malley referred to the shifts in the property tax burden to the rest of the County that will continue until the tax base in the City grows. It is in the entire county's best interest to spur development in the City of La Crosse, and staff is looking for ways to do that. The County will not fund the scholarships, but the redevelopment that will follow. Chair Doyle suggested that it might be a good idea for the Economic Development Committee to be or create a task force to initiate action.

Chair Doyle thanked all the presenters and special thanks were given to County Community Development Specialist Brian Fukuda for his work on the presentations.

**ADJOURN**

**Motion** by Manthei/Brockmiller to adjourn at 8:10 p.m. passed on a unanimous voice vote with 7 excused – Konkell, Flood, Mach, Keil, Ebert, Pfaff and Fisher.

STATE OF WISCONSIN     )  
  )  
COUNTY OF LA CROSSE    )

I, Linda Stone, La Crosse County Clerk, in and for the County of La Crosse, Wisconsin, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Journal of Proceedings of the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors at the Planning Meeting held Monday, February 8, 2010 and that it is the whole thereof. IN WITNESS THEREOF, I HAVE HEREUNTO SET MY HAND AND AFFIXED THE OFFICIAL SEAL THIS 11<sup>th</sup> DAY OF FEBRUARY 2010.