



Washington County Executive Committee

Rick Gundrum, Chair

Mark T. McCune, First Vice-Chair

Donald A. Kriefall, Second Vice-Chair

July 17, 2017

County Chairperson and Executive

Dear County Chairperson and Executive,

On behalf of the Washington County Executive Committee of the County Board, we are writing today to indicate our interest in partnering with your County in applying to be a part of the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin's (LGI) Future Regions Initiative. We are specifically inquiring to engage in this process to seek any and all opportunities to develop cooperative partnerships, shared service arrangements, and even the possibility of implementing Wis. Stats. §59.08 *Consolidation of counties; procedure; referendum*, all of which we believe could help ensure the long term viability of the essential services our citizens rely upon.

Similar to other counties, in recent months and years our county has undertaken several initiatives to analyze and plan for the future. We have developed detailed financial projections and have prioritized programs congruent with our County's values and statutory responsibilities. As a result of this work we have developed a Five Year Financial Plan, Strategic Priorities for the Quality of Life of the Citizens of Washington County and new Vision, Mission, Values and Results. The culmination of this work is our acknowledgement of the stark reality that in order to survive, local governments in Wisconsin must fundamentally reinvent themselves.

It is our sincere belief that the existing climate is grim for county government in Wisconsin, the long term outlook is financially and politically unsustainable. We agree with LGI's assessment that if all things remain the same "the highest potential for local government" is to "maintain existing service levels."¹ However, we believe that maintaining existing service levels, with the perpetuation of tax levy freezes and stagnant State Aids, is only achievable if counties create new fees, new debt, exercise tax levy referenda or reduce staff support or services to our constituents. We believe this to be true, because we are seeing it in all corners of the State, and are experiencing it firsthand here in Washington County.

Rather than continuing to contemplate these largely untenable options we excitedly welcome the opportunity provided by LGI to partner with one of our bordering counties to "rethink and refresh our organizations to work better for a new era."² We see this initiative as an opportunity to fully embrace an alternative to the less than desirable options of raising taxes or reducing services. We strongly believe that partnering with one of our bordering counties toward the concept of 'counties without borders' provides the brightest opportunity for this reinvention.

Do you believe, as do we, that the existing level of services provided to our citizens, although there is always room for improvement, is good and right? Do you believe, as do we, that the State of Wisconsin is not likely to initiate any significant reforms or relief to fiscally sustain these levels of service? Do you believe, as do we, that the Future Regions Initiative is a unique opportunity to “be proactive and shape the futures (we) want”?³ Then, if you believe, as do we, and as does LGI, that the way to do this is through “three factors that will make Wisconsin (counties) more resilient and vibrant in the future: 1) Collaboration 2) Engagement 3) Accountability,”⁴ then we implore you to join us in rejecting a grim outlook, instead embracing a bright horizon and imploring ‘Strategic Foresight’ to reinventing ourselves for the posterity of our region.

As LGI suggests in their program summary, “We don’t have to wait for the other shoe to drop. We don’t have to believe that the sky is falling. We can choose to make the sun rise.”⁵ We anxiously and excitedly await your formal reply to join us in our choice to “make the sun rise.” We respectfully request that you reply at your earliest convenience, but no later than Friday, August 11, as this will provide our counties sufficient time to put together and submit an application to LGI by their next deadline of September 30, 2017.

Thank you for your careful consideration.

Sincerely and Respectfully,



Rick Gundrum
County Board Chairman



Joshua Schoemann
County Administrator

Footnotes

1-5: Local Government Institute - *Future Regions Program Summary*