

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BOARD  
**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

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**PUBLIC HEARING OF THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BOARD**

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Lyle Shields Meeting Room, Brookens Administrative Center  
1776 E. Washington St., Urbana

7:00 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Carol Ammons, Jan Anderson, Steve Beckett, Ron Bensyl, Thomas Betz, Lorraine Cowart, Chris Doenitz, Matthew Gladney, Stan James, John Jay, Brad Jones, Greg Knott, Alan Kurtz, Ralph Langenheim, Brendan McGinty, Diane Michaels, Alan Nudo, Steve O'Connor, Michael Richards, Giraldo Rosales, Larry Sapp, Jonathan Schroeder, Samuel Smucker, C. Pius Weibel, Barbara Wysocki

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Lloyd Carter, Steve Moser

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Kat Bork (Administrative Secretary), Deb Busey (County Administrator), Tony Fabri (Auditor), Dan Welch (Treasurer), Steve Ziegler (First Assistant State's Attorney)

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Weibel called the public hearing to order at 7:07 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Bork called the roll. Ammons, Anderson, Beckett, Bensyl, Betz, Cowart, Doenitz, Gladney, James, Jay, Jones, Knott, Kurtz, Langenheim, McGinty, Michaels, Nudo, O'Connor, Richards, Rosales, Sapp, Schroeder, Smucker, Weibel, and Wysocki were present at the time of roll call, establishing the presence of a quorum.

**READ NOTICE OF MEETING**

Bork read the notice of meeting.

**MOTION** by Wysocki to approve the notice of meeting; seconded by O'Connor. **Motion carried with all ayes.**

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**MOTION** by Bensyl to approve the agenda; seconded by Kurtz. **Motion carried with all ayes.**

## **PRESENTATION OF ISSUE FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **Size of County Board & Multi-Member vs. Single-Member Districts**

Betz outlined the work undertaken by the Policy, Personnel, & Appointments Committee over the last six months in examining County Board reform issues. He reminded the County Board that no action could be taken tonight and directed their attention to the draft ordinance on the back of the public hearing agenda to give the discussion a focal point.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Joan Dykstra spoke about her time on the County Board from 1991-2002 and how the ultimate goal should be providing better service to voters and improving the Board members' accountability. She advocated reducing the Board's size. Three-member districts make it easy for some members to hide behind the others' work and wait until meetings to open their agenda packets. A larger body lessens accountability. Voters will be more likely know who to speak with about issues if there was a smaller County Board. Dykstra acknowledged the dual responsibilities of elected officials to work hard and voters to be aware of candidates. She supported having a redistricting commission with transparency diminishing political agendas and gerrymandering. She has supported a change to single member districts before, but realized the rural population was concerned the representative emphasis would be on urban areas. She recommended the voters elect County Board members who are educated about the needs of the entire county. She finished by stating that reducing the County Board's size is good government.

John Farney supported the idea of single-member districts so voters would be more in touch with County Board members. A smaller, single-member district would prevent a voter from having to repeat a concern to three Board members. Farney also felt a smaller County Board would require more informed Board members and prevent them from putting their heads in the sand on issues like the Nursing Home.

Jerry Watson, the Farm Bureau Chairman, believed having multiple-member districts equalized power and represented minorities. He stated the Farm Bureau was opposed to single-member districts because it could eliminate some productive County Board members. He encouraged further study of the variety of proposals.

Bill Ackermann supported changing the redistricting process and removing it from the hands of politicians. He advised drawing the map in the most non-political manner possible. He wanted more districts with fewer members per district.

Weibel asked if anyone else wished to speak and, hearing none, closed public participation.

## **COUNTY BOARD MEMBER COMMENT**

James spoke about the land area represented by rural County Board members and how having three members per district allows them to cover for each other during times of illness. Without a draft redistricting map in hand he could not say where he would stand on single-member districts. He

appreciated the public participation and noted it was sad that some voters do not even know their representatives' names.

Gladney said he was open-minded to considering changing the size and the districts of the County Board. In response to the argument that there are too many County Board members, Gladney described the elements of the Champaign and Urbana City Councils that he liked. Those elements included the elected officials' names appearing on the screen when they are speaking during televised meetings for the Champaign City Council and how the cities' websites have photographs of council members and district maps. He suggested the inclusion of Board members' names on television and pictures on the website would help make them more recognizable to the public. Gladney did not think one Board member per district would be more accountable than three members. He expressed that voters have had no problem sending Board members emails and voicemails on highly visible issues, such as Olympian Drive. He did not think reducing a government's size should be a knee jerk to people being unhappy with government in general. He knew gerrymandering exists, but voters can elect a different candidate if they are dissatisfied with the incumbent because gerrymandering only works if voters go along with it. Gladney addressed how people have to pay attention to local issues and take responsibility for their votes.

Kurtz described how his one and a half years on the County Board has been an exciting experience of diverse meetings. He felt a large County Board supplied unique perspectives on rural, urban, and minority interests. He was concerned single-member districts would mean a loss of representation for certain areas.

Ammons opposed single-member districts because they would limit minority representation. She wondered about potential election costs with a change to single-member districts. She stressed the importance of citizens being educated about both sides of local issues that impact their lives. Ammons recommended holding more public hearings to encourage further discussion.

Anderson saw the pros and cons of changing to single-members districts. She was concerned single-member districts would mean candidates would have to work harder on their campaigns. The Urbana School Board created smaller districts and some districts had no candidates in the first election.

Michaels was opposed to single-member districts because District 2 covers a vast expanse of land. The land might not be as populated as the urban areas, but those voters still pay taxes.

Langenheim noted that why and how the County Board does something is a matter of concern. Every significant interest group is represented on the present Board, except students, and there is a wide variety of talent amongst various members. He wanted to preserve small districts that enable a candidate to conduct a campaign by knocking on doors without expensive campaign material.

Rosales spoke about the differing philosophies of the two major political parties and how the current size of the Board is unwieldy. He supported reducing the Board's size and having more districts with multiple Board members per district. He hoped both parties will do the right thing by allowing the redistricting to be done by a commission.

Nudo commented about how essential it is to get the right mix of representation through Board size and redistricting. He felt it was in the best interest of candidates trying to contact the voters via inexpensive means to have smaller districts. On the subject of rural representation, Nudo noted because it was essential to maintain farmland, this meant population growth in rural areas was much slower than in urban areas. Nudo described the composition of the district he represents. He acknowledged there may be less rural representation when population grows, but compact districts could result in truly rural representation on the County Board.

O'Connor said he would rather see a rendering of districts before considering a change to single-member districts.

### **COUNTY BOARD DISCUSSION REGARDING FUTURE ACTION**

The County Board discussed the possibility of holding more public hearings. Busey shared information about the entities, including the League of Women Voters, Farm Bureau, and NAACP who were invited to tonight's hearing. The Board discussed whether holding more hearings would generate more public attendance and comment.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The public hearing was closed at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kat Bork  
Administrative Secretary

*Secy's note: The minutes reflect the order of the agenda and may not necessarily reflect the order of business conducted at the meeting.*