

MINUTES
AD-HOC COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY
February 3rd, 2009

Committee Members Present:

Jeff Redick, Don Puchalski, John Curran, Grant Eckhoff, Tony Michelassi,
Jim Zay

Other County Board Members Present:

Dirk Enger, Brien Sheahan

Staff Present:

Jason Gerwig – County Board Office, Tom Cuculich – EDP/County Board
Office, Caroline Roth – County Board Office, Fred Backfield – Finance, Debbie
Rudolf – Finance, Lynn Wood – Finance, Tyrone Tipitino – Finance, Rhonda
Warren – I.T., Debbie Hanson – I.T.

Others Present:

Jean Kaczmarek – Illinois Ballot Integrity Project – DuPage Chapter, Michael
Bowler – Public, Gerald Cassioppi – Public, Paige Winfield – Naperville Sun,
Jake Griffin – Daily Herald, Mike Mulcrone – DuPage Mayors and Managers
Conference

Chairman Redick called the meeting to order at 9:20 AM.

Chairman Redick began by discussing the ultimate goal of the committee, which is to help improve accountability of the government to the people. Chairman Redick said he realizes that Illinois citizens are especially cautious with government due to recent state events, but noted that DuPage County has been honored for its transparency policies and said that he would like to see continued commitment and improvement. Chairman Redick said that while DuPage County information is easily accessible, he would like to evaluate current practices, policies, and procedures, seeking input from staff, elected officials, and the public. Chairman Redick said the committee will call on experts in the area of transparency to provide candid and complete evaluations of County operations. Chairman Redick went on to say that the committee has established an e-mail account to accept citizen input on the issue of transparency, as they want to encourage people to send their thoughts and ideas to the committee. The e-mail address is

transparency@dupageco.org. Chairman Redick asked Chairman Schillerstrom to share his thoughts and goals regarding the committee.

Chairman Schillerstrom said DuPage County has increased amount the information available on its website, created a strong procurement policy, appointed a well respected ethics officer, and held numerous hearings on various issues. Chairman Schillerstrom said his goal is to take transparency further by finding and funding new technologies, implementing new practices, and enacting new legislation. Chairman Schillerstrom briefly discussed Illinois' new administration as well as the new state agenda and said his hope is that DuPage County remains as transparent, if not more so, than the state. Chairman Schillerstrom would like to see the committee examine what new technologies and tools will be required to do so.

Chairman Redick said the purpose of the first meeting of the Transparency Committee is to lay the groundwork for its activities as they go forth. Chairman Redick said each committee member received a basic calendar of activities for the committee and then opened discussion to the committee, asking members to share their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions.

Member Puchalski said he thinks it is critical that the committee have an expert brought in to give options and suggestions as far as new technologies and other improvements that can be made. Chairman Redick said he would like to first establish an evaluation of the current obstacles, issues related to Information Technology, Finance, and Human Resources, and other activities the County currently engages in. Chairman Redick asked Member Puchalski if he thinks the committee should plan to call in experts before staff is able to give their input. Member Puchalski suggested the experts and County staff work simultaneously. Chairman Redick said that could work but he will seek input from different departments in writing prior to inviting any experts for a meeting.

Member Michelassi said the first suggestion he has to pursue transparency is to make sure those committees which are appointed by Chairman Schillerstrom, whose budget falls under the County Board's purview, should be subject to Board's advice and consent. Mr. Zay said it is state law that the Chairman make said committee appointments. Mr. Michelassi suggested the Transparency Committee give recommendation to the County Board to have their lobbyists go to Springfield and lobby for a slight alteration of the state law regarding appointments, in order to provide that much more transparency.

Member Michelassi said he spoke to Fred Backfield a couple of months ago regarding the County budget. Member Michelassi said he and Mr. Backfield discussed preparing a laymen's summary of the budget to post on the County's website in order to make it a smaller document. Member Michelassi suggested creating a one- to two-page summary that would outline the basic budgeting of each department and specific large line items. Member Michelassi said he believes this would make it more easily accessible and readable for the average citizen. Chairman Redick noted that, through preparation he has done on the subject, he found that many transparency groups prefer when information is provided to the public in its entirety.

Member Michelassi went on to discuss the scheduling of County Board and committee meetings. Member Michelassi said that current schedule makes it difficult for many citizens to attend meetings. Member Michelassi added that he thinks meetings should be held when it does not conflict with the average DuPage resident's working schedule. He suggested the committee chairmen work together in order to make such scheduling happen.

Member Michelassi said he agreed with Chairman Schillerstrom regarding advancements in the I.T. department. Member Michelassi said he thinks the I.T. department could use an independent perspective, perhaps through gaining their own department head. Member Michelassi continued by suggesting I.T. levy its own staff.

Member Michelassi suggested that applications for County appointments, which are submitted through Human Resources, be given to the County Board for review in their entirety, with personal identifiable information redacted from them to protect those applicants' privacy. Member Michelassi feels doing so would assist the Board to make a more educated decision in filling positions.

Member Michelassi discussed the quarterly County newsletters that are distributed to DuPage residents. Member Michelassi suggested giving residents the option to receive newsletters via e-mail rather than mail them in order to possibly increase the frequency of the newsletter.

Mr. Zay said the County needs to look at budgetary numbers. Member Zay mentioned that streaming County Board meetings online could cost \$50,000-\$60,000. Member Zay further suggested the County talk to Comcast in order to get better service rather than spending additional taxpayers' money. Member Zay also said that some of the committee members' suggestions could be looked into, but some would virtually eliminate the role of Chairman. Member Zay finished his thoughts by saying the County must make sure to have budgetary restraints when looking at different transparency options.

Chairman Redick said he views the roles of the Transparency Committee much like the Strategic Planning Committee. Chairman Redick said the goal through this process is to evaluate the options that are available, and to provide a working roadmap for transparency to the County. Chairman Redick said that any initiative they want to take on would have to go through the normal committee structure. Chairman Redick said it is important to lay out a list of necessary improvements and a long-term goal.

Member Curran said it seems to him the focus of the Transparency Committee is making all records open to the public in a user-friendly format. Member Curran said the committee should look beyond just the subject of open records and look into what authority the County does and does not have. Member Curran said he would like to see what the whistle blower protections are for County employees. Member Curran would also like to look into campaign finance and what is appropriate as far as donations to office holders from individuals that do business with or provide service contracts to the County. Member Curran went on to talk about open meetings, suggesting the County put

together a searchable data base that would give an individual the ability to track documents, such as resolutions. Member Curran said the County should be very open and forthright with the citizens it represents when there are conflicts of interest arising.

Member Redick said he is taking notes on what is being said and suggested and he will raise the issues with staff and experts that are being brought in to discuss transparency.

Member Eckhoff said he thinks the largest source of comment regarding transparency will come from sources outside the County Board. Member Eckhoff thinks that some issues discussed are accessible through other departments.

Member Redick discussed future meeting dates and agenda topics for the Transparency Committee. Member Redick said the committee will be meeting on Tuesday afternoons and one Tuesday evening. Member Redick said representatives from some of the expert groups the committee has discussed will attend the February 17 meeting. Member Redick went on to take a motion to approve the committee calendar as submitted. Member Puchalski moved to motion, seconded by Member Curran. Mr. Backfield said that the Freedom of Information Act listed on the agenda under Finance is actually under the jurisdiction of Cara Perrone and the Human Resources department. Member Redick asked that FOIA be addressed under Human Resources on the agenda, and then asked to incorporate the change in the motion. All ayes, motion passed.

Jean Kaczmarek of the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project – DuPage Chapter gave public comment. Ms. Kaczmarek discussed issues that she has had requesting more transparency and access at the Election Commission. Ms. Kaczmarek was in contact with Bob Saar of the Election Commission and says she was unable to get any answers regarding her concerns. She then discussed the fees that are charged for FOIA documents from the County, and how document copies are free of charge from the State. Ms. Kaczmarek thanked the committee for their time and for hearing her concerns.

With no further comment, Chairman Redick motioned to adjourn at 9:55 AM, seconded by Member Zay. All Ayes, motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah Daly