

EQUITY AND REGIONALISM – LESSONS LEARNED

A survey of some leaders in urban areas that have undergone a form of governance restructuring and a review of relevant literature.

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A survey of some leaders in urban areas that have undergone a form of governance restructuring and a review of relevant literature.

A. Background and Purpose

The current fiscal crisis of the City of Pittsburgh, plus several analyses (Brookings, Paytas) indicating that the region suffers economically because of governmental fragmentation, have caused increased discussion about the merits of some form of governance restructuring such as through boundary changes or functional consolidation.

Through this research and recommendations provided herein, Sustainable Pittsburgh aspires to ensure that considerations regarding representation of economically disadvantaged citizens and communities of color are addressed up front as opposed to being an after thought in any proposed consolidation or merger.

Therefore, Sustainable Pittsburgh sponsored an analysis of lessons learned from restructuring around the country and invited its Diversity and Leadership Committee to help guide the research.

Regions contacted were:

- Indianapolis, IN
- Jacksonville, FL
- Louisville, KY
- Miami, FL
- Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN
- Nashville, TN
- Portland, OR

Most responses dealt both with the success or failure of the restructuring as well as the main focus, the impact on issues of concern to communities of color.



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B. Findings

1. There is no model for governance restructuring. Every case differs in terms of:
 - Which functions were consolidated
 - How much of the county or area was included
 - The powers of the resulting structure
 - The ability to exert a larger global presence due to simply being a larger entity both in terms of geography and population. This appears also to bolster hometown self-confidence.
 - Possibly a leaner and more professional government work force.
2. No one knows the social, economic, fiscal, environmental or community impacts of these restructurings for certain either because no scientific analysis of conditions before and after restructuring has occurred and/or because restructuring is too new. Pittsburgh can be the first to do this if the work by Dr. Ralph Bangs, University of Pittsburgh, on current conditions of African-Americans and other minorities can be continued and inform a comparison of post-restructuring conditions – if such occurs.
3. Based on anecdotal evidence, restructurings have been successful if the criteria are limited to efficiency and effectiveness in contrast to equity. This includes:
 - Cost savings realized by merging some duplicative functions.
 - Enhanced positioning for attracting economic development based on the ability of the regional core to speak with one voice and to target public resources.
4. Failure needs to precede success. Commonly, initiatives for governance restructuring either failed or resulted in half-steps prior to the current restructured condition.
5. Although the general view is that issues of concern to African-American citizens are not ignored under the restructured government, several observers at the University of Louisville (Savitch and Vogel) claim that the merged council emphasizes suburban concerns rather than urban ones. They state, “...the belief that big box solutions either are meant or are used to alleviate socioeconomic disparities has no basis in Louisville”. An ex-Jefferson county commissioner also holds this view. (Owens)
6. Savitch and Vogel conclude, “The major consequence of city-county consolidation in Louisville is likely to be a more internally cohesive regime, coupled to weakened city neighborhoods that are less able to influence the development agenda



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- and more rather than less urban sprawl.”
7. The National Research Council commissioned a 1999 study dealing with metropolitan governance edited by Alan Altschuler and others. Several observations in this report also cast doubt on improvement in equity issues through government restructuring. A review of a number of consolidation efforts concludes, “...reformed metropolitan institutions often do not provide services any more equitably...” Another conclusion following analysis of Indianapolis, Nashville, Jacksonville and Miami states, “Metropolitan Governments are uniformly much more successful in dealing with the physical questions...than they are in dealing with social issues such as fiscal disparities, race relations, open housing and the location of public, low-income housing in the suburbs...” “These governments have not eliminated the biases of the multicentered metropolis on social access issues of zoning, schools, and housing.”
 8. Another pertinent finding in the Altschuler book was that, “In general, campaigns for metropolitan reforms are generated at the elite level in response to a specific problem of governance. “Consolidation is not basically a grass-roots movement.
 9. Blomquist and Parks, University of Indiana, have similar views with respect to the Indianapolis - Marion County merged Unigov. Countywide services are not primarily aimed at equity concerns. Residents of the old city of Indianapolis (now Center Township) “still support (their) own poor-relief activities through property taxes levied within the township”. Also, “... Unigov does not reflect significant effort to use the larger jurisdiction...to effect wealth or income redistribution”. In addition, major equity issues such as schools and criminal justice are still controlled locally. Thus, with regard to equity considerations, the Indianapolis model structure of Unigov can be considered ineffective.
 10. Crosby and Bryson at the University of Minnesota feel that the Met Council also has not attended to issues of importance to the poor and minority communities. Issues such as transportation, affordable housing and the jobs-housing balance have not been high priorities. The leadership of the Met Council has been made up of business people, government officials and good government advocates. This, the authors feel, “...has kept poverty, minority concerns and social planning on the back burner”. Because the Met Council has the authority to move on these issues, their lack of action can be



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considered a lack of will. The authors feel that an elected Council would be more responsive.

11. Pittsburgh City Councilman Sala Udin is skeptical that issues of concern to the disadvantaged and communities of color will receive high priority from a suburban dominated City - Allegheny County merger. He observes that, at present, responsibilities carried out by Allegheny County for all areas of the County shortchange City residents.
12. In at least three cases – Indianapolis, Louisville and Nashville – African-Americans were appointed to deputy mayor positions.
13. Several observers emphasize the need to be very clear about why consolidations should occur. The adage that form follows function applies.
14. Portland METRO is not responsible for major equity concerns such as jobs, housing or education. However, it has a powerful indirect impact. Directing development within the growth boundary requires urban issues to be dealt with in contrast to the more common “suburban flight” response to such issues. (Brooks)
15. The role of schools is important to the success of the restructuring effort and equity impacts. Louisville had a unified county school district prior to merger and observers felt this was a major contribution to the ultimately successful decision to consolidate the city and county. Indianapolis, on the other hand continued their tradition of multiple school districts. Several observers feel that this continued the inequitable distribution of educational resources. (powell, Blomquist and Parks)
16. In the Louisville case a faculty member at the University of Louisville was commissioned to create districts that would have the racial balance to help ensure that the new council was adequately representative of the African American community.



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D. Recommendations

1. Creation of districts for a new legislative body must respect the need for proportional representation of African-Americans for the purpose of ensuring that their concerns are placed on the table. However, at least in some cases, neither proportional representation nor high-level appointments assure that issues of concern to African-Americans are given priority.
2. Guidelines/goals/requirements for expenditure of public resources should be addressed in any new government charter. It is noted that any attempt to target funding based on socio-economic need would favor the city and older suburbs/mill towns and, therefore, create additional resistance from the newer suburbs.
3. A charter should also require proportional representation of racial minorities on all governmental committees, boards and authorities as in Louisville via state legislation again, for the purpose of ensuring that their concerns are addressed.
4. To ensure that cost efficiencies do, in fact, result, detailed analysis of each function should be undertaken prior to formal restructuring.
5. From equity standpoint the issue of school mergers should be discussed at the same time as the restructuring of municipalities. At one end of the range, failing systems would be merged with neighboring successful ones perhaps with additional state funding. At the other end, would be an Allegheny County-wide system with assurances of at least equal resources available to all students or even additional resources to those areas that have had limited resources in the past.
6. Dr. John A. Powell argues for “federated regionalism” by which is meant that public goods and services should be provided by the most appropriate level of government – regional or local. Techniques worth considering, he notes, are:
 - Cumulative voting – This involves large districts from which more than one person is elected. Voters get as many votes as there are people to be elected. For example, if there were five people to be elected, a voter who strongly favors two candidates would give each candidate 2.5 votes. This allows political minorities to elect someone to office. Voting rights scholar Lani Guinier has promoted cumulative voting as a colorblind means to provide fair minority representation.
 - Some form similar to the United States Senate and House of Representatives whereby the



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composition of the Senate equivalent on the regional level could recognize especially non-majority interests.

- More neighborhood control over a larger allocation of resources. For example, a portion of the government's budget could be given to neighborhoods based on factors such as population, density, poverty, etc. The neighborhood would proceed to allocate the funds to, for example, public safety, street repair, playgrounds and other public responsibilities in amounts they felt appropriate.
- Requirements for a supermajority (such as two-thirds or three-fourths of the governing body) to approve regional actions. This, he feels, would provide minority communities with the opportunity to bargain.

7. Kenneth T. Jackson argues that both explicit and implicit government actions have created the racial, economic and spatial disparities in today's metropolitan regions. In response he suggests three possible responses.

- Annexation

- Regionalizing government functions
- Fair share agreements such as affordable housing throughout the region

8. There are two overall recommendations:

- a. At this time it is necessary to identify local efforts being undertaken to evaluate various models for possible restructuring of the governance functions of Pittsburgh and other local and county governments. Advocacy should be undertaken to ensure that equity issues are on the agenda and that an in-depth analysis of the findings and approaches listed above are included.
- b. Following in-depth analysis, whatever approaches are identified to ensure that merged or consolidated functions/governments address equity concerns, must be built into the structure. They must not be left to be worked out later or dependant on the goodwill of future officials.



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E. Additional Research

1. How many county/area-wide elective offices are filled by people of color in regions that have undergone restructuring relative to their African American and other minority populations?
2. What would legislative district boundaries that ensure minority representation in a merged government look like?
3. What are the local details of the mega-district approach or cumulative voting? A range of possible outcomes should be described using different boundaries and assumptions based on the racial and socio-economic characteristics of the districts.
4. What are the details of school district mergers? A range of possible district combinations should be described showing the resulting racial and socio-economic characteristics of each.



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