

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. County government in Wisconsin is both directly and indirectly affected by the continuing growth of population and the movement of our population to the cities.

Urban growth has been much more dramatic than that for the state as a whole, concentrating in the southeast part of the state and centering on Milwaukee. Of special significance in the rapidly growing urban areas is the fact that the rate of suburban fringe growth around communities of 25,000 or more has typically exceeded the rate of growth of the central communities.

In terms of population composition, the rural counties rank high in the per cent of population 65 and older; the urban counties rank low. Except for Indians, the non-whites, though few in number, live mainly in the southeast triangle of the state.

Urbanization has been accompanied, if not caused, by the shift from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy. All of these things together have modified profoundly the traditional economic and social patterns of Wisconsin, and undoubtedly will influence modifications and changes in the tasks that various governmental units now perform.

2. County government operations and responsibilities have increased considerably over the past two decades and show every sign of more increase in the immediate years to come.

Over the years major shifts have occurred in the division of tasks between the state and the counties. Although the state has tended to assume direct responsibility for the performance of functions which have a particular impact in urban areas, thereby tending to reduce the importance of the role of the county as the agent of the state, the county's functions as a local unit of government have increased markedly. This has been true for those activities of the county which are optional or permissive to a larger extent than for those activities which are mandatory upon the county. Paralleling the increase in activities is an almost three-fold rise in county expenditures since 1935, and probably a comparable rise in the number of persons in the county work forces.

3. The problems that counties face arise as much from the changing pattern of state-county relations, as from urban fringe growth.

Under the impact of urbanization town governments find it impossible to survive, and municipal jurisdictions frequently cannot expand fast enough under present statutes to solve the governmental service and regulation problems that press relentlessly upon them. Is it an appropriate course of action to so redefine and reshape county government so that it can provide a more responsive and more effective instrument of government in the rapidly growing areas of the state?

4. In this changing situation, the problems that counties face can be grouped into four main categories:

- rigidity of structure and powers, that is, county uniformity
- the continued increase in the size of boards as well as inequalities in representation
- diffused and uncoordinated administration
- the provision of urban-type services.

5. An analysis of the differences among the 71 counties which stem from urbanization (population, economic base, and governmental organization and services) reveals three main groups of counties:

- one very large, almost completely urban county, Milwaukee
- 14 large counties over 60,000 population, strongly urban in character and likely to be more so in the years to come
- 56 smaller counties, many quite rural in character; a few counties which lie in the environs of the large centers are significantly influenced by urban trends.

6. Study of the constitution indicates that it places obstacles in the way of structural reorganization of county government. Section 23, Article IV has had the most direct influence in shaping the character and development of county government in Wisconsin: "The legislature shall establish but one system of town and county government, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable." Attempts to secure optional forms of county government were stricken down by the Supreme Court, stating that the optional plan "...instituted a fundamentally different system and not merely a variation of the existing system... (it) promotes needless diversity..."

Yet there is some room within the uniformity provisions for introducing more flexibility in county government. In particular, it would seem to be possible to achieve this through introducing an additional class of counties comprising the 14 large counties over, say, 60,000 population and less than 900,000. This would open the way to permit the legislature to modify the size, composition, and structure of certain county boards elsewhere in the state -- if it deemed that the increasing urbanization of those counties, as in Milwaukee at the turn of the century, made strict uniformity no longer practicable. Any changes adopted, however, would have to be mandatory, not optional. In order to provide optional forms, to introduce major structural changes, or to increase county home rule, it would be necessary to amend the constitution. The dual role of the county, however, makes the problems of administrative organization and management especially complex. However, there are various possibilities within the framework of the present constitution for improving the direction and management of major county services which might be explored.

7. The present method of selecting supervisors results in a legislative body at the county level which is among the largest in the nation. Continued population increases and urbanization will very likely further increase the size of the board in the large urban counties though at a lesser rate than population increase. Moreover, wide variations exist in the number of electors represented by supervisors, variations not only among counties but within individual counties.

Appraising Wisconsin's past preference for a large board rather than for a small one and assuming that our citizens are likely to continue to be most comfortable under a large board, it seems likely that the excessively large county boards should be reduced from their present unwieldy size. The average county board is now 36 members. The 32 boards in excess of 36 members include all of the 14 large counties except Kenosha, Racine, and Sheboygan.

Various methods can be employed: (1) to reduce the size of county boards, or at least to prevent further increases; and (2) to secure greater equality of population representation, at least within individual counties. It is possible to apply these methods to the group of urban counties where the problem is most severe and leave the remaining counties untouched.

8. Assuming that agreement could be reached on reducing board size to some stated maximum for each of the 14 urban counties, and that representation should be equal, the question then is: what method might be employed for the election -- or rather the apportionment -- of supervisors with counties? The various methods available are:

- retain the present system of unit representation, but require small units to combine for the purpose of electing supervisors
- base the election of supervisors on assembly or supervisor districts
- elect the supervisors at-large.

There are a number of variations under each method.

Generally population is the most useful, practical, and acceptable basis for representation, but other factors can be used -- area, equalized valuation, or combinations of these. This is a question of legislative policy. The proposal to associate representation on county boards with school districts would appear to be of doubtful utility.

Basing representation on assembly districts would seem to be the most practicable type of change and to offer the most advantages.

In the larger counties there would seem to be many advantages to be derived from electing the county board chairman at-large and giving him some general powers to supervise county administration on behalf of the board.

9. Counties, particularly the large urban ones, face problems of organizing to administer and manage an increasing variety of services and service functions. They vary considerably in the way they are presently organized to perform these services. Systematic study and careful scrutiny of present county organization, management and services needs to be made (as suggested in the preface) before urban growth outruns the ability of counties successfully to administer their affairs.