

WISCONSIN - CITIZENS STUDY COMMITTEE
ON METROPOLITAN PROBLEMS

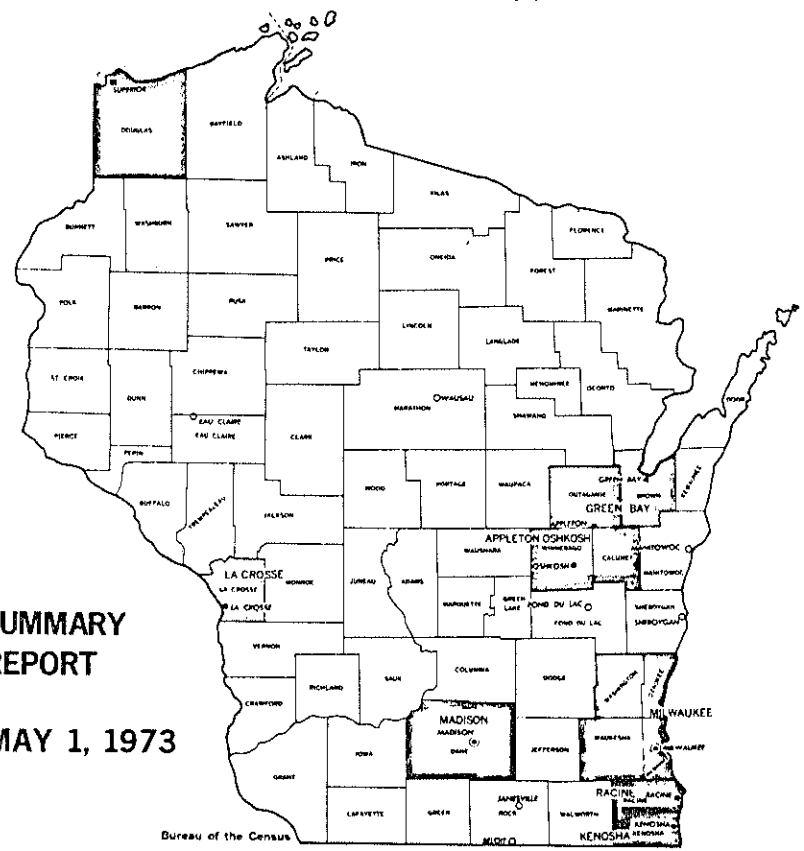
[Reports]

Citizens Study Committee on Metropolitan Problems

Wisconsin Department of Local
Affairs and Development
123 West Washington Avenue
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State of Wisconsin



**SUMMARY
REPORT**

MAY 1, 1973

Bureau of the Census

Citizens Study Committee On Metropolitan Problems

SUMMARY REPORT

Wisconsin is far ahead of many states in its efforts to solve the problems of modernizing government to meet changing needs. Wisconsin urban areas, on the whole, do not have the intensity of problems that face some of America's cities and suburbs. This is due, in part, to the chance circumstances of history, but also to the state's progressive tradition of meeting critical issues as they arise.

Yet because of the failure to deal head on with certain urban problems as they have arisen, air and water are polluted, open lands are being unnecessarily squandered and housing and public transportation are deteriorating. The property tax penalizes owners who make home improvements. The method of financing local government often rewards the wealthier communities with few problems and penalizes the localities with the most problems and greatest expenses.

Efforts to solve such problems are literally scattered over the countryside. There are 479 separate local units of government in the state's eight Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Racine, Kenosha, Appleton-Oshkosh, La Crosse and Superior). There is an average of one local government—a county, city, village, town, school district or special purpose district—for every 4,308 people in these areas.

A number of state task forces have been charged in the past with studying the means to improve local government in Wisconsin. The Citizens Study Committee on Metropolitan Problems was given a broader responsibility than most. On April 29, 1971, Governor Patrick J. Lucey created the study committee by executive order and gave it this assignment:

"The Committee shall investigate the fairness, adequacy, efficiency and responsiveness to the people of local government in the metropolitan areas of the state. The Committee shall consider not only existing problems but shall also determine how the problems of the future might best be provided for. The Committee shall then report to the Governor to recommend possible modifications of state statutes concerning local government within a period of approximately one year* from the date hereof."

*The deadline was extended to December 31, 1972.

HOW DID THE COMMITTEE OPERATE?

For 20 months the 22 members of the Committee explored the problems of metropolitan areas and local government structure. The full committee met 37 times. There were at least 100 subcommittee sessions and many hours of work outside the formal meetings. Eleven full days of public hearings were held with 222 persons submitting statements.

The staff of three professionals interviewed more than 200 persons concerned with local government and did in-depth research on the characteristics and problems of the state's metropolitan areas. Questionnaires were sent to 25 other metropolitan areas to investigate local government reorganization efforts throughout North America.

The Committee focused on the eight Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) in Wisconsin. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a SMSA as an integrated economic and social unit with a recognized population nucleus. Each metropolitan area consists of a central city, or contiguous cities, which must have a population of at least 50,000, and the surrounding county or counties in which the cities are located. The Committee restricted its research and public hearing efforts to the eight SMSAs to concentrate its time and resources.

Metropolitan and Urban Areas

Contain 71% of Wisconsin's Total Population

A number of moderate-sized Wisconsin communities are not large enough to meet the metropolitan criteria established by the Census Bureau, but share many of the problems found in the larger areas. Rock, Marathon, Sheboygan, Fond du Lac, Manitowoc, Eau Claire and Wood Counties all have growing populations which are more than 50% urban, but are not defined as SMSAs. Of Wisconsin's eight SMSAs, six are comprised of one county—Madison, Racine, Green Bay, Kenosha, La Crosse and Superior. Superior actually is part of the Duluth, Minn.—Superior SMSA, which includes more than one county, but since it includes only one Wisconsin county, it was treated as a single-county SMSA. The Milwaukee SMSA contains Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington Counties. The Appleton-Oshkosh SMSA contains Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet Counties.

Wisconsin's SMSAs in 1970 accounted for 57.6% of the state's total population. Between 1960 and 1970 they grew at a combined rate of 14.7%, compared with a combined 8.1% increase for non-metropolitan areas. With the addition of 625,529 persons in non-SMSA urban areas, 71% of Wisconsin's population resides in metropolitan or urban counties.

It is the Committee's belief that many of its recommendations are of importance to the entire state, from the smallest rural community to the biggest city. Much of the wealth that supports Wisconsin's renowned higher education system, fine highways and consumer-oriented natural resources programs comes from the large urban areas but benefits the entire state.

The Committee found that the net, per capita tax contribution to state government from metropolitan areas was \$151, compared to \$83 from non-metropolitan areas. Were it not for the metropolitan areas, people in the rest of the state would have had to pay an additional \$75 million in taxes in 1970 to maintain spending at the existing per capita level.

Therefore, although this task force concentrated on the problems of the metropolitan areas, this report is clearly one of concern to the entire state of Wisconsin. The future of Wisconsin will be directly related to the future of its large metropolitan regions.

WHAT DID THE STUDY COMMITTEE CONCLUDE?

Generally, the Committee found there is no major crisis in local government structure or operations in Wisconsin's metropolitan areas. No city or county is bankrupt or even on the verge of it, as is the case in some American cities. Our counties, cities, villages and towns are, for the most part, well run by honest, dedicated officials.

Problems within the state's eight metropolitan areas are more critical in some jurisdictions than in others. Pollution, substandard housing and inadequate public facilities, for example, do not affect all persons in the same way in a large urban area; therefore reactions to recommended solutions also vary. But the Committee has tried to devise ways to cope with such problems before they reach a crisis stage for the whole metropolitan community, thus furthering the progressive tradition of Wisconsin.

The Committee's underlying conclusion and most pervasive general recommendation is that modernization of local government can best be achieved by building on the strengths of existing institutions rather than creating new ones. This could be accomplished by removing present constitutional and statutory strictures and providing maximum flexibility in creating new government mechanisms.

The Committee recommends that county government be substantially strengthened in executive leadership and operating authority to provide urban services and cope with urban problems. The Committee rejects legislation that would mandate major changes in the structure of local government. Which services should be retained by city, village or town government or which should be performed at the metropolitan level should be local options to best fit varying needs and desires.

While it recommends more county options, the Committee also suggests that municipalities be encouraged to voluntarily cooperate with one another and with the counties in providing some services jointly. The present cooperation statutes should be amended to make it clear that municipalities can take joint action for problem solving of any type.

In many instances, the Committee also recognizes that problems transcend county and even metropolitan boundaries. It recommends that land use controls and water pollution abatement be handled on a regional basis, and that housing for lower income families be provided in suburban and rural portions of metropolitan areas as well as in the city. It strongly recommends state financial aid to help solve urban problems, with the conviction that these problems will affect the future of the entire State of Wisconsin.

The Committee also finds that many urban difficulties are reflected in the sense of alienation among many people toward their governments—the feeling that government is remote and uncaring. Therefore, the Committee recommends decentralization of some services and programs to bring them closer to the people. This concern is found in recommendations for neighborhood service centers, community involvement in health, housing and welfare and in a proposal for neighborhood advisory groups to discuss police priorities and policy.

A list of key recommendations, outlining some of the interrelationships, follows:

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

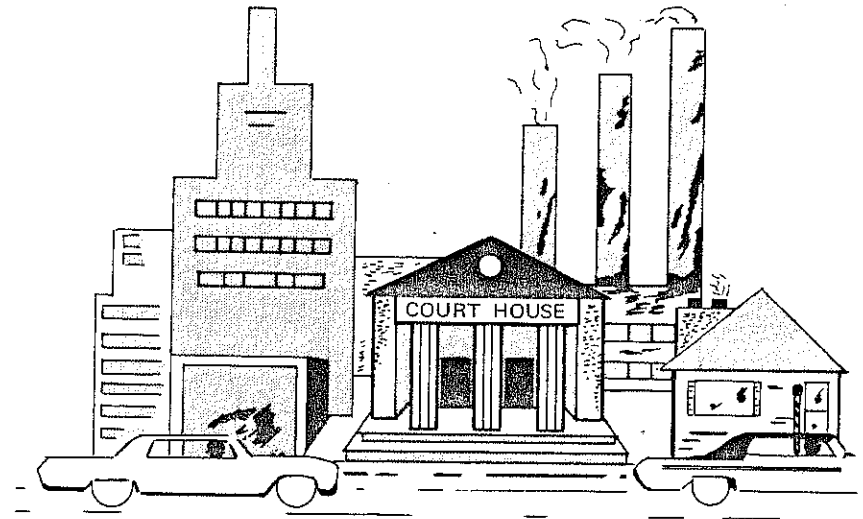
1. State legislation should be passed authorizing counties to form general purpose districts, called urban service districts, covering their urbanized areas. The urbanized portion of a metropolitan area would be defined by statute, taking into account density of population, incorporation of communities and other factors. Persons living within such a district would have the right to vote in its formation and on the services to be provided. Problem-solving efforts would be financed by the property tax within the district, by redistribution of funds now paying for the selected services and by state incentive funds.

2. It should be state policy to provide financial incentives to counties which form urban service districts for problem-solving efforts on an area-wide basis.

3. When urban service districts exist side-by-side in adjacent counties, the districts may voluntarily merge and provide services jointly. To encourage such cooperation, the Constitution should be amended to allow the Legislature to change county boundaries to better reflect true communities.

4. Counties should have the right to modernize themselves and not be handcuffed by constitutional restrictions. Within procedural limits, counties should have the ability to decide for themselves which urban services they will

provide. County Boards should have the option to determine whether top county officials are appointed or elected, and the board should be able to reorganize both the committee system and county administrative functions. Moreover, all urban counties should be required to have chief executives.



5. Although the Committee makes no recommendations on urban problems which might best be dealt with by urban service districts, it suggests the possibility of urban districts performing these functions:

- A. Mass transit, which could be operated by a district within a single county, a single county under contract with other municipalities or a metropolitan transit authority.
- B. Public health programs, which could be provided at least on an entire county basis, or, in areas where urban service districts embrace more than one county's territory, in the whole district.
- C. Police support services, which could be shared and financed throughout an urban service district. Support services are communications, record keeping, vehicle maintenance, operation of detention facilities and laboratories, and perhaps some specialized investigation—but not basic patrol or peacekeeping activities.
- D. Consolidated municipal and county law enforcement, which could be extended to an entire county or an urban service district. This is recommended particularly in smaller, more rural metropolitan areas.
- E. Waste water treatment, which could be assigned to an urban service district to make sure that treatment plants and sewage collection lines within urban areas meet abatement plans for entire watersheds.

OTHER MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Efforts to plan and implement water pollution abatement programs should be carried out on a watershed basis to assure the best engineering solution and most economical control. The state should provide financial incentives for area-wide efforts, rather than piecemeal progress. Extensions of water and sewer systems should follow regional plans.

2. Regional planning agencies should certify all *major* land use changes to determine whether they conform to regional plans. If not, no municipal zoning changes should be allowed, or building permits issued, pending review of the certification decision by a state appeal board.

3. Disputes between incorporated and unincorporated areas over annexation, incorporation or consolidation should be settled by a state Boundary Review Board, which would decide which alternative provided the most orderly growth for the future of the state or region. Specific considerations would include land use, sewage treatment service, and industrial site location, among other things. If uncontrolled expansion of local boundaries is allowed, problems of land use, pollution control and mass transit, to name but a few, are destined to increase. There must be orderly growth to assure that urban services can be efficiently and equitably provided.

4. Housing for lower income families should be provided on a metropolitan basis without municipal veto over housing projects. Metropolitan housing authorities should be required if the state finds an acute housing shortage in any metropolitan area, and incentives should be provided by the state to encourage housing. A "fair-share" system of allocating housing, following proper land use planning, should be used.

5. Public mass transit should be supported by the state as a matter of general policy. The state should provide funds for capital improvements and transit operations. Motor vehicle taxes should be increased in relation to vehicle value to help reduce demands on the property tax for needs associated with the automobile.

6. The section of the Wisconsin Constitution which prevents the state from providing funds for "works of internal improvement" should be repealed, particularly so state aid can be provided to help solve transit and housing problems.

7. The same basic financial support should be provided for all elementary and secondary education pupils within the state, regardless of where they live. The decision to supplement spending on educational needs at the local level should be retained.

8. Public law enforcement policy and control of police departments should be placed in the hands of elected officials, subject to safeguards against undue political interference. Definite terms of office should be set for police chiefs.

9. The administration of the property tax should be shifted from the municipal to the county level, and each county required to support professional assessments on all property within the county. The state should set standards, monitor performance, provide financial aid for county systems, and perhaps perform assessment of industrial and major commercial property.

10. Assessment should be at 100% of property value, or minimally, property owners should be informed on their tax bills of both their assessed and equalized property valuations.

Government Financing Changes Proposed; Tax Base Sharing Should Be Studied

In the important matter of financing local government, the Committee suggests no major changes in the present method of finance, except those specifically mentioned above. It recommends that the property tax be used primarily for services relating to property, and that the entire cost of welfare, including general assistance, be assumed by the state and federal governments.

The Committee recognizes that the revised state shared tax system and the federal revenue sharing program are new, making it impossible as yet to determine their impact on local finance. However, it recommends that the state study property tax base sharing among municipalities within a metropolitan area as a future possibility.

To help put these recommendations into perspective, this summary provides a hypothetical example of how an urban service district might operate in the Green Bay metropolitan area, which encompasses all of Brown County:



A SAMPLE URBAN SERVICE DISTRICT

The Brown County Board of Supervisors decides to form an urban service district covering Green Bay, De Pere, Howard, the Town of Allouez and the urbanized portion, by definition, of the Town of Ashwaubenon.

The Board decides that the district should perform waste water treatment, solid waste disposal, mass transit, parks and recreation services and police support functions such as joint purchasing, communications and record keeping. Municipalities would continue to operate all other urban services.

It is proposed that the property tax base of the entire urbanized area support these joint services. To encourage formation of the district, the state offers additional financial aid to Brown County. The rural portions of the county do not financially support district services, continuing to rely on the county for some services and their municipalities for local services. However, under more flexible voluntary cooperation laws, the county and some towns and villages agree to form a consolidated law enforcement agency operated by the county. The county also does all property assessment.

After public hearings and some adjustments in the district plan by supervisors living within the proposed district, the district is approved by referendum.

Municipalities and the county then agree that housing problems are not confined to the urbanized portion and a metropolitan housing authority, covering the entire county, is formed.

Although the urban service district is charged with operating and financing its sewerage system, the Green Bay area recognizes that it is part of a larger region and watershed. It cooperates with Outagamie and Winnebago Counties in planning and financing, with state and federal incentives, a regional pollution abatement system on the Fox River.

About this time, a large land development firm seeks town rezoning to build a regional shopping center and subdivision outside the urban service district. The development is considered by the Brown County Regional Planning Commission to be of major regional significance and is reviewed by the commission to determine whether it is in conformance with the regional land use and transportation plan. The commission determines that it is not in conformance because it would disrupt natural drainage and create major transportation problems in an area not served by adequate roads or transit.

The commission rejects certification which blocks the rezoning. The action later is upheld by a state appeals board. Thereafter the developers decide to build on a site in the Town of Ashwaubenon, within the service district, meaning new tax base for all urban services as well as the entire county. Public facilities can be provided, and the plan is certified.

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COPIES OF REPORTS

The findings and recommendations of the Citizens Study Committee on Metropolitan Problems are available in several reports. They can be obtained by sending a remittance or a letter to the addresses listed:

1. *Final Report, Citizens Study Committee on Metropolitan Problems.* This document provides details on recommendations and offers some of the full Committee's research. It is 300 pages long, including the appendix. PRICE: \$3.00. Checks or money orders should be made payable to the **DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION** and sent, along with a request for a report, to:

Wisconsin Department of Administration
Document Sales
202 S. Thornton Ave.
Madison, Wisconsin, 53702

2. *Summary Report.* This short document offers a brief description of the Committee's work and summarizes its recommendations. Copies are available free on request from the Wisconsin Department of Local Affairs and Development, 123 W. Washington Ave., Madison, Wis. 53701.

3. *Selected Subcommittee Reports.* A limited number of subcommittee reports are available on the subjects of land use, housing, transportation, pollution abatement, economic development and public safety. These reports contain additional research. In some cases, their recommendations were changed as part of the final report. Copies are available from the Department of Local Affairs and Development, Madison.

The Committee's full presentation to the Governor including hearing testimony, all working papers and other subcommittee reports was not published. A single set of these volumes is on file in the Governor's office.