

c. Report on AB-494

Via PowerPoint presentation, Betsy Fretwell, City Manager, City of Las Vegas, and Katy Simon, Washoe County Manager, reported that Assembly Bill 494 requires that the cities and counties in Clark County and Washoe County provide a report on consolidation efforts to the Director of Legislative Counsel Bureau. The presentation included slides pertaining to Functions in the Report, Specific Information Requested, Current Applicable Statutes, Examples of Consolidated Efforts in Southern Nevada, Examples of Consolidated and Shared Service Efforts in Washoe County, Shared Services Evaluation in Washoe County, Key Dates, and Next Steps.

Questions and Discussion

Mr. Reilly: This is definitely an area that could be divided and conquered given that it becomes very emotional sometimes. There are some very specific legislation that give specific time tables and the options of moving forth can be individual, regionally, state wide.

Councilwoman Jessica Sferrazza , City of Reno: Part of the issue we run into with consolidation being cost prohibitive are things like cherry picking and some of the other legislative mandates that deal with consolidation. Does part of the study focus on working with our legislature to see if some of the regulations can be changed so that consolidation does make sense in the future? That seems to be one of the biggest obstacles we have when looking at efficiencies or consolidating different departments.

Betsy Fretwell, City Manager, City of Las Vegas: The legislation does not specifically say identify any legislative obstacles to the consolidation, but that would probably be a natural part of the feasibility analysis that is required. Since these reports will be presented to the legislature, any of those constraints would be part of the feasibility section so the legislature can determine if they want to address it if a consolidation were pursued.

Councilwoman Jessica Sferrazza, City of Reno: Does the study also include services that we can potentially share with the state? I think we should compliment the legislators who are here. I just personally want to compliment our legislators. I think this is an area we could look at through NACo and Nevada League of those shared services and the things we can look at and partner with the state.

Mr. Reilly: Sharing not only among cities and counties, but also cities, counties, and state.

Mayor Susan Holecheck, City of Mesquite: I really enjoyed the home rule discussion. Mesquite is one of the six cities that is a general law city, so the empowerment under 266 is different. Regarding consolidation, we enjoyed and would welcome consolidating on many different levels. But logistically, given the size of Clark County, we're concerned with joining with Metro. We have our own police department. The level of service that we've created within Mesquite, just the distance alone, we're hoping people are mindful of that. Animal services might be another. There might be areas where some of us on the fringe of Clark County, to consolidate everything, might be problematic.

Mr. Reilly: So paying close attention to service delivery as we talk about consolidation.

Councilman Duncan McCoy, City of Boulder City: Consolidation and sharing of services has been discussed by the legislature a lot over the years in various forms. This effort brings the conversation back down to the local level where it belongs. Regarding consolidation, we need to keep in mind that you can talk about consolidation of services without talking about consolidation of governance. When you consolidate governance, you can create a situation where people in the outlying areas have less opportunity to participate. It is also important to remember when you're talking about consolidation, whether services or governance, that all the agencies that might be involved in the consolidation efforts or the combination of services, need to be at the table so that this is not imposed on one agency from another agency.

Robin Williamson, Supervisor, Carson City: We are the only consolidated city county government in the state of Nevada. We are not involved in this legislative report. I think it would behoove the counties to identify the regional work that has been going on between county sharing services. Between Douglas, Carson City, Lyon, Storey, we do a lot, especially in law enforcement and different youth detention facilities where we have gotten permission to share facilities and money. Perhaps it might be to our benefit to identify where counties are working together to provide better services to our residents and educate our legislators that those efforts are going on.

Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani, Clark County: I believe public safety includes the courts, and that there is potential there to make sure we're delivering services well. Personally, I believe the courts are a state responsibility. I would also urge everyone to involve employee representatives, because you don't want things to be happening to people. You want them to be part of the solution. There are certain things that are best handled service delivery, but there are also components of that. There are ways to do efficiencies that deliver a service, but you still empower the local jurisdictions.

Councilman Steve Wolfson, City of Las Vegas: I was going to discuss whether you call it consolidation or reorganization of our court system. In particular, our justice court and municipal courts. These are big revenue raisers for our entities. I really would like to see this committee study the consolidation or reorganization of the lower court systems.

Mr. Reilly: A broader definition of public safety should include courts.

Commissioner Kitty Jung, Washoe County: There is generally wide spread panic among staff when dealing with shared services. That creates a problem going down the road because we have to rely on staff to give us information about how we can move forward to be more efficient. We are going to have a town hall meeting with our employees so they feel like they are part of the process. We don't foresee further staff layoffs considering how many hits we have taken at this point. More importantly, their jobs probably will change in the future, as all of ours will, as we progress and evolve. The other side is that we will be avoiding future costs so they can have more job security working in a noble profession as public service.

Commissioner Warren Russell, Elko County: I did an interview with one of the police officers representing Clark County and talked to him about Metro. One of the points that was brought up was it was something like nine to ten years from starting to work on the process that they accomplished having a working viable police department. In this context, it appears the conversation is drifting to things that will be long or medium term. I'm wondering about consolidation in terms of expectation. Is there some consolidation going to occur or be directed? Is the next session going to direct us rural counties or your counties?

Mr. Reilly: It looks like it is both short and long term. The fact that they included a permanent committee lends to the idea that many of these discussions are long term in nature. None of these shared services were easy. They took a long time, and it would appear that the legislature recognized it is more of an ongoing issue. But there may be some short-term areas that could be accomplished.

Katy Simon, Washoe County Manager: There are short-term opportunities, and there is really a continuum from things like sharing bids for purchasing all the way to full consolidation. There are a lot of steps along that continuum, so there are opportunities to look at things in your own organization. We are aware there is some discussion that some folks think consolidation is a magic bullet that will produce large amounts of savings that could then be returned to the state. It does not necessarily save lots of money when we have all cut so much from our budgets, but it's an efficiency for the future. So both short term and long term opportunities are worth doing. It will take a long time and a lot of money if we integrate our technology systems. As we replace technology systems, we can look at if we can do the same technology system so we can be more efficient for all our shared constituents.

Mr. Reilly: It necessarily will not be a savings in service, but it could make a world of difference to the citizens who deal with the services.

Councilman Stavros Anthony, City of Las Vegas: I understand the intent of the legislature and agree that consolidation and regionalization are good. Two concerns I have are if you're going to do consolidation, you have to do an in-depth study to really find out if it works. Bullet three says to identify the aspects of those functions that are not consolidated and whether those aspects may be appropriate for consolidation and reorganization. There is less than a year to do that. You could spend one year just doing a department with the county and city. I'm not sure if we could do all that. Number two is I still don't know how, who, and what. How are we going to do all this as far as whether the cities and the counties are going to do their own or are we going to get together?

Betsy Fretwell, City Manager, City of Las Vegas: These are complicated complex studies. As a region, we are going to need to have a discussion very quickly to figure out how we are going to address this legislative report quickly. There have been some preliminary discussions at the regional planning coalition level about the potential of that group taking up this topic on behalf of the region. That would be a discussion among the southern Nevada governments. There is quite a bit of cost to do this analysis. The legislation creates three key areas to be focused in on, so that may be a way to take it one piece at a time and hit on the areas that the region feels are most significant to address prior to the legislature convening next year. We can turn in what we can get ready by September and describe what was unable to get done.

Katy Simon, Manager of Washoe County: I applaud our elected officials in Northern Nevada in Washoe County area. Two each from Reno/Sparks Washoe County and the School District serve on our joint elected official shared services committee and created that themselves to give us guidance. I would also caution that even though the existing legislation does not include anyone besides Clark and Washoe, I can foresee that it may be broadened for other entities to look at shared services in the future.

Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani, Clark County: I'm a firm believer in stealing ideas. I might suggest that the respective cities and counties look at establishing a shared services committee of elected, similar to what Washoe and Sparks have done. Let's not reinvent a wheel; that might give us a place to look at.

Councilman Steve Kirk, City of Henderson: Will the legislature allow us to make suggestions to services that we want to consolidate, like the court system? Or is it specifically for public safety, public works, and general government? Or does the court system fall under the public safety?

Mr. Reilly: I would imagine that you have to minimally cover those areas. You could add other areas, but public safety could be very broadly defined to include the court system. Many areas consider that part of public safety.

Mike Alastuey, Technical Advisor: You need to have two realms. One potentially is consolidation of services now provided by a local government with some degree of latitude, or one local government for another level of local government. Another realm would be a state prescribed structure for the judiciary. The way the justice townships are established, the exact structure and counties covered by the district judiciary and the governance of the supreme court. In those areas where there is significant state overlap, you would have a complete other realm of the proposal to seek legislative approval.

Councilwoman Lois Tarkanian, City of Las Vegas: I wanted to add support about having a shared services committee. We're talking about things that take months and years. We also know we're going to go back to our offices and are going to be inundated with a lot of other things. Getting to those big things takes time. I think that shared responsibilities committee, if we can steal it a little bit from up North, I really think it would help us down South. And it would show the legislature at least we're starting and trying. If we all throw out our ego and don't get involved in who has more authority here or there and truly look at what's best for the citizens, I think we can accomplish something.