

Development of a More Efficient,
Effective and Responsive
Government



Doing More With Less

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**Summary Report
of the
Guilford County
Effective, Efficient Government Committee**

Presented to

**The Guilford County Board of
Commissioners**

Tuesday, March 17, 2009



Summary Report

Guilford County

Effective, Efficient Government Committee

Introduction

The Effective, Efficient Government Committee was appointed in December 2008 by Guilford County Board of Commissioners Chairman Melvin “Skip” Alston, with a charge to “bring efficiencies and increased effectiveness within Guilford County Government.” This included developing short term actions that might affect the 2009 – 2010 fiscal year budget, intermediate term actions, and long term actions that can streamline and strengthen County government.

The members of the Effective, Efficient Committee include:

Commissioners

- Carolyn Coleman (Committee Chairwoman)
- Kirk Perkins

Community Leaders

- Robert S. Chiles
- Mark Kiel
- Richard “Skip” Moore
- Steve Showfety

County Staff

- Brenda Fox
- Sharisse Fuller
- Billie Martin Pierce
- Jeff Thigpen

County Administrative Assistant, Lisa Kimber, provided administrative support to the committee.

Overview

The potential for building efficiency must be examined from three points of view:

- *Short term actions:* These are actions that can be taken immediately and have a direct affect on the 2009-2010 fiscal year budget.
- *Intermediate term actions:* These are actions that could be implemented as soon as possible, but the financial savings may not be fully realized in the next fiscal year. However, these actions should lay the groundwork for greater efficiencies to be realized and help the County avoid future budget increases.
- *Long term actions:* These are actions that will redefine the way the County conducts its business. These initiatives will require more extensive study and development work prior to implementation. While not likely to provide immediate savings and efficiencies, they have significant long term potential.

Given the compressed schedule for budget development, the initial focus of the committee has been to study County operations with the goal of making recommendations by March 17, 2009. We believe this will be more useful to the Budget Committee and Board of Commissioners in preparing for the upcoming fiscal year. During the meetings, the committee:

- Heard presentations on the overall organization/structure of County Government.
- Reviewed actions that would affect the overall fiscal status of the County.
- Heard presentations from most departments about their operations and budgets. In these presentations, department directors offered their assessment of the operational impact from budget reductions of three and five percent.

The committee members have agreed to continue meeting after the March 17th initial report submission to identify additional long term actions. A report will be delivered to the Commissioners upon completion of the committee's work. These recommendations will include ideas on:

- Improving effectiveness of services and responsiveness.
- Reducing costs.
- Merging and/or consolidating services.
- Reassessing business operations to improve functionality.
- Enhancing technological capabilities in County departments to realize short and long term savings for citizens.

This report presents recommendations developed over the course of three months. The committee believes the following actions lay the foundation for more efficient and effective County government. The specific recommendations of the committee and associated savings reflect projected total reductions of approximately \$13.5 million, including:

- Departmental/Operational reductions - \$5.3 million.
- Voluntary Enhanced Retirement Option reduction - \$5-6 million.
- Merit freeze for employees - \$2.2 million.
- Significant energy savings are projected but not quantified at this time. The Energy Audit will be completed prior to budget finalization.

Foundation for Planning

The County is currently developing a strategic plan. For the upcoming fiscal year, departments have been charged with submitting budgets that prioritize their activities into three categories:

- Mandated, no cost control.
- Mandated, can control cost.
- Not mandated.

The committee feels that all of these should be carefully considered in the budgetary process.

To ensure that activities are aligned closely with strategic planning, the committee recommends that each department develop a set of appropriate “best practices” related to:

- Assessing and streamlining business operations.
- Enhancing technology capabilities toward effective and efficient service.
- Cross training of staff in core office functions.
- Developing the ability to assess and track customer service performance.

With such best practices in place, performance measurement should become a priority for each department and should be based on clear goals, objectives and verifiable outcomes for accountability.

Short Term Actions

Short term actions that will have an impact on the upcoming fiscal year can be separated into two categories:

- Across-the-board actions that impact the overall County.
- Department-specific actions that impact the activities of individual departments.

Across-the-Board Actions

- Freeze the hiring of all non-essential County positions.
- Freeze employee merit increases for fiscal year 2009-2010. This recommendation is made in order to save personnel costs, and be fiscally responsible in the current economic climate. The estimated savings are approximately \$2.2 million.
- Provide early retirement incentives, for a projected approximate savings of \$5-6 million. Departments have been directed to realign positions and redesign business practices to avoid filling non-essential positions.
- Review retirement health benefits for long term competitive advantage.
- Open present contracts for (re)negotiation for more favorable rates for services.
- Make performance management a priority in all County department, based on clear goals and objectives, establishing and utilizing verifiable criteria to measure outcomes.
- Evaluate potential consolidation of some County offices with locations in both Greensboro and High Point to eliminate duplication.
- Update County space utilization study to explore consolidation and potential sale of at least one County building.
- Study department directors' mileage usage and travel allowances along with the potential use of pool vehicles.

Department-Specific Actions

- Examine centralization of human resources functions currently being provided within the Human Services Departments for potential consolidation under County Human Resources; develop appropriate job descriptions, reduce or reassign staff as needed, and develop an implementation plan.

- Provide customer service training for County employees. Human Resources will be responsible for hiring staff and developing a program with clear goals, objectives and performance measurements. Standards would include verifiable outcomes.
- Reorganize and realign business practices in the Greensboro Tax Department collections office.
- Evaluate the current organization of the County Legal Department and explore centralization; consider option of engaging County Attorney on a contracted basis.
- Install and maintain energy and space utilization strategy, to be supported by Planning Department staff, including inspectors. Lighting, retrofitting, and cable installation are examples of tasks to be performed.
- Reassign automobiles to County departments to reduce the amount of current reimbursement for use of employees' personal vehicles.
- Determine the average cost of vehicle maintenance per year. Compare costs with counties of comparable size that operate or contract their own maintenance centers.
- Explore the feasibility of a joint City/County maintenance center.

Intermediate Term Actions

A number of actions can begin in the near term, but cost savings and efficiencies may not be realized in the next twelve months. However, most of these recommendations could be implemented immediately with efficiencies and savings accruing thereafter. Again, some recommendations are general in nature while others are targeted.

- Continue to explore software options to increase technology and automation to further streamline intake functions in the Human Services Departments.
- Develop a digitization initiative to transform Guilford County government into a more “paperless” operation. Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Public Health, Sheriff, Legal Department and Clerk to the Board presented significant needs for scanning and digitization. The Register of Deeds and Information Services will partner with these departments to complete these projects. As a result, this effort will enhance the capabilities of the Harmony system, implementation and search of e-Medical records, criminal records, legal contracts and Board of Commissioners’ actions.
- Explore current billing practices (Human Services, Emergency Services, Tax, etc.) to evaluate operational efficiency, confirm compliance and maximize revenues.
- Evaluate the feasibility of call center implementation based on departmental reports of frequently requested customer information and service requests.
- Review more efficient use of cellular phones through study of other organizations.
- Suggest the Board of Commissioners consider seeking legislative authority to conduct a “Voting Center” pilot in Guilford County in 2010, thus eliminating Election Day precinct costs.
- Explore inter-jurisdictional partnerships and/or merger of Guilford County, City of Greensboro and City of High Point Planning Departments. Each entity could potentially save financial resources and improve customer service in the areas of planning, permitting and inspections through increased collaboration.
- Consider reorganization of Animal Control; explore intergovernmental partnerships to identify possible cost savings and improve customer service.
- Begin initial energy audits of five County buildings by North Carolina A & T Center for Energy Research and Technology to identify short and long term savings.

Long Term Actions

It is clear that significant long term efficiencies and savings may be realized by rethinking many business and operational practices. While some recommendations are presented in this report, the committee plans to meet further and issue a follow-up report that delves more deeply into long-term possibilities. Some of the initiatives listed below are also identified as Intermediate Term Actions and are considered as an ongoing process.

The following initial recommendations are introduced and may be further developed through additional committee meetings:

- Complete a comparative analysis on the benefits of issuing bonded debt in the near term, to take advantage of reduced construction costs due to current economic conditions and lower bond interest rates, instead of delaying bonds until the economy improves. Will immediate cost savings outweigh increased costs and interest in the future?
- Undertake a department by department study to analyze mandated services versus service and programs that have developed over time that, while useful, may be considered for reduction or elimination. A subset of this study should include a space requirement study for future County facilities.
- Review mutual service agreements between the County and each of the towns and cities to determine levels of costs and services.
- Explore inter-jurisdictional partnerships and/or merger of duplicated services between the County and the City of Greensboro as well as with other jurisdictions such as High Point that desire to participate. Among the specific studies that should be continued are:
 - Explore merger of County and City Animal Control services.
 - Undertake a study to identify other areas for mutual service or consolidation such as Purchasing and Fleet Maintenance.

Conclusion

Although the targets presented to departments for reduction were three percent and five percent, the economic outlook continues to present new challenges. Sales tax revenues are declining and lottery dollars may not be available for school debt service. The committee recognizes its efforts include limited findings and recommendations from December 2008 to March 2009. The committee's recommendations are the result of in-depth research and meetings with many department directors, yet we recognize that more review and discussion by the Board of County Commissioners is needed as the County moves through the budget process.

