



# The Eighty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan

November 2001

## REGIONAL ISSUES FROM A STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

On October 19, 2001, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan sponsored, in conjunction with its 85th Annual Meeting, a panel discussion on Regional Issues from a Statewide Perspective. Participants on the panel were Dennis W. Archer, Mayor, City of Detroit, Thomas L. Hickner, Bay County Executive, John Logie, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids, and Mark Wollenweber, City Manager, City of St. Clair Shores. The panel was moderated by Chuck Stokes, Editorial Director, WXYZ-TV/Channel 7. This publication is an edited transcript of that discussion.

*STOKES: Let me begin with a question to each one of the panelists. What is the status of regional cooperation in your individual area and how it relates statewide? Do you first and foremost believe that there has been a considerable amount of regional cooperation? Why don't we begin with Mayor Archer, since we are on his home turf, Mayor Archer?*

**ARCHER:** Chuck, I believe that there has been a very high degree of cooperation. I think it started on Inauguration Day back in 1994, where we had an event at the Detroit Institute of Arts and I purposely invited all of the elected officials in the tri-county area in an effort to demonstrate my desire and the City's desire to work cooperatively with all of the elected officials. From my perspective, when you take a look at the issues that we have been confronted with, whether it happens to be money for highways, or other issues, we've had a very good working relationship. When I've had challenges in Lansing, the city has had supporters coming from mayors and other elected officials in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. From my perspective, we have a very good working relationship.

*STOKES: Thank you Mayor Archer. Mayor Logie, same question.*

**LOGIE:** Good afternoon, and first let me thank the CRC for inviting me to come across the state to be with you. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to be back in Detroit with my friend Dennis. He and I have worked together for all the years that he has been Mayor with a

group called the Urban Core Mayors. That's 12 of the older cities in Michigan that have come together over the last 8 years for exactly this purpose. That is, to start thinking regionally and working together for our common interests. That is one element of my response.

There's no shortage of government in West Michigan. We have 637 elected officials, which, as the note says are precisely 100 more than all of America elects to go to Washington. That's just around the 47 units of government that make up metropolitan Grand Rapids. We're not unique and that is part of the challenge when we get to talking about regional activities and thinking regionally,

because you're going to have to continue to *act* locally. I will give you three specific examples that are works in progress and in varying degrees are already enjoying some success.

One is our Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, which started life about 10 years ago with about 11 communities that came together under a then-new state statute to provide regional planning. We are now 33 local

units of government that have voluntarily joined together, similar to your SEMCOG [Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments], but with our own statute to run under. We are now the planning organization recognized by both the state and federal government. Just bringing all those people to the table, I think, was a healthy and positive activity.

Secondly, we have the first joint multi-city public transit system in the history of Grand Rapids. You folks



Panelists taking questions during the eighty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Citizens Research Council on October 19, 2001, at the Detroit Athletic Club

## Citizens Research Council of Michigan

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are more experienced with that down here, but for us it was a first. Just two years ago, when 6 cities came together, agreed on a common millage to request of their residents, got it, and formed the Interurban Transit Partnership (ITP), which is now running about 170 percent of what we were running before. That common millage was one of the finest hours of beginning regional cooperation.

Lastly, like most cities we are a supplier of water and sewer services to a whole lot of other people. And 5 years ago we started rewriting the water and sewer agreements. Typically they are in 30- to 40-year increments. But we thought we had an opportunity to act regionally, if in fact the city was willing to cede some of the power that it



Board of Directors Chair Amanda Van Dusen and Board of Trustees Chair Dan Kelly welcome Mayor Archer to the CRC Annual Meeting

normally would hold over water and sewer to a cooperative brought together by multiple units of government. So we went to all of our sister communities and negotiated new contracts with them that not only provide water and sewer on a much better set of terms but is a true partnership. Two keynote features of this new system, without any changes in state law, are: the first urban growth boundary, similar to what you have heard about in Portland, Oregon, has been voluntarily established for about 80 percent of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area. Secondly, an urban cooperation board is now deciding on how to use a whole block of money to which each one is contributing on a regional basis. So, the short answer is, regional cooperation is alive and well in Grand Rapids.

*STOKES: Thank you Mayor Logie. Same question to Tom Hickner from Bay County.*

**HICKNER:** For those of you who may not know where Bay County is, I always introduce myself as Tom Hickner, County Executive from the Bay City Area and you pass us on your way up north all the time.

Our situation in terms of regional cooperation is mixed at best. We have, I guess, 3 good examples where we have had some success, the first being our community college, Delta College, which has been around for over 40 years and is recognized nationally as one of the best. Tri-City Airport, which again was a cooperative venture between the three communities of Saginaw, Bay, and Midland, and which has continued to see a very good increase in passengers. Then the third would be a relatively new effort called the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network, which in fact won a national award here in Detroit several years ago as part of the national sustainable development initiative in which former Vice President Gore was very active. That is a collection of communities and non-profit organizations and community activists interested in sustainable development throughout the watershed. Although the watershed extends all the way down to Howell and 26 counties, the real core of the watershed is the Saginaw Valley and Bay, Saginaw, and Midland counties. The Dow Chemical Corporation was very instrumental in helping to get that organization up and running.

On the other hand, we have not been able to reach the level of cooperation that the Mayor of Grand Rapids discussed. While some communication occurs between governmental entities, it is not significant and it is not to the level I think it needs to be. On economic development we still look at issues on a very parochial standpoint of attracting jobs to Bay County versus Midland versus Saginaw.

We also have to deal with the dynamics within the communities, the overall racial composition and the ability of the overwhelmingly white community of the Bay City Area being able to work cooperatively with the City of Saginaw on some of the core urban issues that they have. I am very optimistic, however, that we will be able to accomplish that because Bay County and our areas are usually about 10 years behind every other community. It gives us an opportunity to learn from the accomplishments of communities like Grand Rapids and Detroit.

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STOKES: *Thank you very much. Mr. Wollenweber?*

WOLLENWEBER: It is very auspicious for me to sit with this kind of a panel as a staff person. Usually we sit a step lower. But I do appreciate the opportunity to be here. I have worked in 4 different communities in the metropolitan area and have seen a series of wins and losses. I think the reviews are mixed. I would say that the personal leadership that Mayor Archer has demonstrated throughout his administration with the Hands Across the Eight Mile Border, in our case and certainly others, has promoted a good working relationship. Among many of the cities there have been some wins for transit, although there are still some issues to deal with in that area. GIS [geographic information systems planning], with which the counties and cities have been involved, lends itself to a more regional approach. But, on the other side, you have neighborhood or community pride that says, "I've got to have some identity. I really don't want a larger police department because I want the officer to drive my son home if he has had too much to drink that night." Although there is an identity for the local communities, there is a whole series of issues that people have to address on a regional basis.

STOKES: *Thank you. What do you see as the major barrier to regional cooperation and, if you feel there are some barriers, how do you go about removing those barriers?*

WOLLENWEBER: As an example, state legislation allows for, but does not mandate tax base sharing. In Minnesota, and some of the others, the state has come in and mandated it. That has not been the case in Michigan where the Headlee Amendment requires the State to pay for State mandates. So, instead we have only voluntary cooperation. It takes the personal commitment of the elected officials, the staff people that work for them to kind of make those things work.

STOKES: *Mayor Logie did you want to respond to that?*

LOGIE: There are a couple of keys to this problem. One is land use patterns; the other is race. What you find here in Michigan with the older urban core centers is that, first, we are much denser in population than our surrounding suburbs. Secondly, we are not growing as fast. Grand Rapids is the only major Michigan city that actually had real growth in the decade of the 90s, ac-

ording to the 2000 Census. Every other major city lost population—some of them dramatically. Meanwhile my suburbs are growing 20 percent. We were growing at 5 percent and they were growing at 20.

One of the problems that a core city person runs into is that the people around you want to play "castle." Castle is played this way; I'm inside the castle, you're not. We're going to keep the drawbridge up and we won't feed the alligators in the moat. It's a not-so-clever way of saying, "Go away. We've got ours and leave us alone." It's against that mentality that we have to interact on a positive basis to find ways to break that down. Some of these partnerships that I'm talk-



Mayor Logie and Mark Wollenweber discuss major barriers hindering regional cooperation

ing about have to deal with that mentality. It is true in Saginaw, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, and some other cities that the largest concentration of minorities is in the core cities. It begins to go almost lily white the minute you cross out of that core city boundary and go into the suburbs. Housing patterns and how they are put together and how they are maintained are a critical element that has to be attacked. To be precise, many communities try to maintain what they believe are high property values by allowing only large lot homes to be built. This effectively excludes several types of households, including singles, some empty nesters, single parents, and the elderly along with lower income people. The favored middle class family with kids today represents just 25 percent of new home buyers. Only 11 percent of U.S. households are traditional families with children and just one wage earner. It is against that problem that we have to find ways to help spread people around and intermix them across those municipal boundaries. That is the challenge.

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ARCHER: It has been my observation that barriers were in place decades ago. Fast-forwarding to where we are today, there has been dramatic improvement and the improvement comes from the hard work behind the scenes. For example, John, on the issue of race, New Detroit does an outstanding job. Shirley [Stancato], you are to be congratulated for the work that you all have done. I know, since I've been Mayor, I've called upon New Detroit, not only since you've been there, but your predecessor, Bill Beckham and before that Charlie Williams. In terms of dealing with the issue of race, we have had instances in our city where African-Americans feel that in some instances business owners of the Middle Eastern community do not treat them with respect and dignity. I've called upon New Detroit and I've personally been involved at the table as well. There has been a substantial improvement of the dialog, such that there can be honest discussion about what needs to be done and a better appreciation for what each community has contributed to the world and both American and Detroit civilization.

We benefit from groups like SEMCOG, led by Paul Tait and his very fine organization. We have the issue of transportation and our seemingly inability to break through and find common ground, but I think that we have done that and I think that has been finally resolved. Now, if the legislature would only act and



CRC Trustee Jim DeBoer and Director Kent Vana talk with panelist Tom Hickner

create the Rapid Transit Authority. They made a commitment that they would do that. We had the Minority Leader in the House and the Speaker of the House at the Detroit Regional Chamber meeting in Mackinac saying that they would embrace the recommendations that have been made by Brooks Patterson, John Hertel, Ed McNamara, and myself.

SEMCOG plays a major role, as does the Detroit Regional Chamber, representing some 12,000 businesses in our community and we have been able to work in such a way that we have been able to go on trade missions and sell our entire region. People have asked "How can you, as Mayor of the City of Detroit, go and not sell your city, but sell the region." I said, "Be assured, I say some very nice things about the City of Detroit and why people ought to come here and do business," so I can put Beth DunCombe or Gloria Robinson on them and bring them into Detroit. But if we don't get them into Detroit, I certainly want them in the region, because, if they're in the region, they are going to come to the DIA [Detroit Institute of Arts], they're going to come to the baseball games, or the hockey games.

Then we've got organizations like Detroit Renaissance, which has played a major role, very quietly breaking down barriers. I defy anybody to come into this city with a good business plan and not get the kind of funding that they need from our banks. This is in contrast to the early-80s, when there was a copyrighted story in one of our papers talking about how there was red-lining against minorities. So Paul Hillemonds and his group does a very fine job. Then of course, we have communication that works very well between the mayors and the county execs on issues. If we see something that's occurring, we can take care of it and shed some light on it so that we can learn from it.

Now, having said all of that, we still have a long way to go. Race is a very important issue that has not been resolved, but we've made great strides at working at it. If only we can get through it, there's an opportunity to compete. In business, so many outstanding fine minority businesses are able to achieve success. Then the children who are going to our public schools can believe and understand that they don't have to be athletes to be successful; that, indeed, they want to get better grades so that they can own businesses or be able to get jobs in business. So these barriers are coming down.

STOKES: *Thank you Mayor Archer. Tom Hickner, did you want to touch on that?*

HICKNER: Yes. There are three points that I would make. First is the concept of tax base sharing. My suggestion would be that the state adopt a policy that would take all growth in commercial and industrial property



Tom Hickner emphasizes an example of regional cooperation in Bay County

and put it into a statewide pool. Share it across the board rather than continuing the current situation, which allows and encourages local governments to compete against each other for tax base. That is constantly the issue at the local level between a township and a city, or a township and a township, trying to attract new business. They're chasing after the taxes that new businesses might bring.

Second, would be to look into the proposal that was adopted in Texas. I would not necessarily be one to suggest that we should ever model ourselves after Texas, but they did adopt an amendment to their constitution a number of years ago, which allowed local governments to, in effect, have a charter written and to totally revamp the structure of local government. Today there are so many offices and units of local government that are protected, that have constitutional privileges that are major barriers to the kind of cooperation and the kind of coordination and efficiency that we really ought to have at the local level. While the legislature in no way will ever have the courage to go ahead and actually deal with that issue itself, giving local communities the opportunity to do it on their own might produce some interesting results over the next hundred years, or less—or more.

Then the third area is the issue of education. There have been some very good reports that have come out on urban sprawl and the impact of taking farm land versus not investing in your core cities. There really needs to be a very focused education process, particularly at township officials and other local officials who fundamentally do not realize the implications of what urban sprawl does, not only to the cost structure of their particular local gov-

ernment, but more importantly what it does to the central cities. If you go back to the *Detroit Free Press* 10 years ago, the concept of land use and urban sprawl was seldom mentioned. It's really not a new concept, but it is a political movement that, over the last five to seven years has begun to have momentum. We really have to look at these issues from a long-term perspective if we're going to have any hope of change.

*STOKES:* Let me ask one last general question that you all may want to address. You've all touched on some big areas whether it's transportation in terms of getting people from point A to point B; or it's rebuilding our roads; or it's our infrastructure and our sewers breaking down, things that will cost us millions, if not billions, of dollars over the next 20, 30, 40 years. Could we do a better job cooperating regionally on these types of big-ticket items? And where will the money come from if we don't band together as regions?

*ARCHER:* Well, let me address the issue of water and sewage. I think if you were to ask the mayors and counties that receive water and sewage services from our Detroit Department of Water and Sewage, you would find that they are very pleased with the quality of work and information flow that is provided to all of our respective communities on what it is that we are doing, why we are making the changes, and the rates that we recommend to City Council for increases. The reality of it is, as we look forward, 10, 15, 20 years out—there are some necessary changes that are going to have to be made. We are still going to have a great economy. We have a momentary problem presently, but we will get through this and get back to the kind of economy that will allow us to grow. There is going to be enormous growth that's going to take place in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. As you start thinking about the 125 municipalities that we serve, these great suburban communities have grown because of the policy of the City of Detroit not to sit back and conserve or withdraw water, but rather to allow our communities to grow. We are now 300 years old and our suburban communities are substantially younger. But there's going to be growth and when there's growth you're going to need water and you're going to need sewage. The federal government is imposing new requirements on us. We've come to understand that it's important to be able to appreciate the flow of water when it's a huge

rain. Now, many communities are dealing with something called “combined sewage overflow.” To meet the challenges and regulations set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency and others, we are, with Paul Tait’s help, looking at future growth and what will that cost us. The cost is going to have to be borne by the users. As we contemplate growth, we need to contemplate what it’s going to cost and how we’re going to share the cost. These are things that we are working on and I think, with the spirit of cooperation, we will succeed.

We are also dealing with the Big Three—the other Big Three. And what I’m referring to as the “other Big Three” are Henry Ford Health Center, the Detroit Medical Center, and St. John Health Center.



CRC President Earl Ryan addresses attendees at the 85th Annual Meeting

People do not appreciate the struggles that they have to provide the kind of care and treatment, day in and day out, when the population groups they serve are considerably challenged as a result of being below poverty, having no health insurance and the like.

Look around the region and compare this with what is going on at the University of Michigan and what is going on with Beaumont, Providence and others, or the Mt. Clemens General Hospital and the like. There are some huge challenges to the medical professional and to these hospitals in terms of providing care and treatment that this region needs. Not that the region itself has to solve it, but we have to come together collegially to make the case in Lansing and in Washington as to what must be done to provide good quality health care.

*STOKES: Thank you very much. Anybody else?*

*LOGIE: The question of how we deal with replacing aging infrastructure is probably one of major issues that is facing every major metropolitan area, certainly east of the Mississippi and probably on both sides of it. You can find one answer if you look at the cities of Charlotte, North Carolina, Jacksonville, Florida and Indianapolis. The state legislature and the communities got together*

and all of a sudden you had a workable approach. Jacksonville is a good example. Ten years ago, it was city of 175,000 and a metro area of about 700,000; very similar to Grand Rapids. Today there’s a city of 750,000. They boomed. Let me tell you why that isn’t going to happen here: If I talk to a mayor from down in Kansas when we’re comparing local government forms in our respective states and I say, “Well, mayor what kind of local government have you got down there in Kansas?” He’s going to say, “Well we’ve got the counties, the cities and the villages. What have you got up there in Michigan?” I’m going to say, “Well, we’ve got the counties, and the cities and the villages—and we got townships.” And he’s going to say “Townships? Townships? What’s a township?” And I say, “Well it’s a 214-year-old anachronism from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 when the federal government, suddenly getting its hands on the upper midwest—what we now call the states of Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Indiana—thought they’d lay it out on town and range lines in 6 by 6 squares called townships.” He’ll say, “I understand your history lesson, but what do they do now?” And I say, “Not much. They buy most of their services from guys like me.” But I’ll tell you something; they aren’t going to go away. There’s a little organization that operates out of Lansing called the MTA and that’s not what Charlie was riding in Boston; that’s the Michigan Townships Association. Michigan Townships Association is one of the most effective lobbies in Lansing and it has a sole purpose. Its *raison d’être* is the perpetuation of townships. So, I’m too old to get into that hassle. The point is that we’re going to have to find a new way to solve some of these problems because the one that they pulled off in Indiana and North Carolina and Texas and elsewhere is not open to us.

The alternative is to create positive incentives to get us to do the things that we all kind of know would make good sense. Do we really need 40 police chiefs and 27 fire chiefs in metropolitan Grand Rapids? I don’t think so. But the question is how do we get from where we are with everybody’s little fiefdoms and everybody’s little pockets of authority and move us in a positive direction. Money and a positive incentive, rather than a ukase from the throne telling us what to do, might be a good idea.

*STOKES: Mayor Logie, someone wants to know how appropriate is Senator Glen Steil’s drive to take control, and that’s their word, of Detroit Metro Airport. I’m as-*

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*suming that they want you to answer because you are from outside this region and may be able to be a little more objective about the question at hand. What respect does this show for local government?*

LOGIE: Well I've been Mayor now 10 years. I've been actively involved in watching our state government work for much longer than that. It comes about in part because over the last 4 or 5 years we've lost a thousand years of institutional memory in our State Legislature, in large part thanks to Glen Steil, who is the godfather of term limits. Don't misunderstand, Glen is one of my Senators, his district includes Grand Rapids and I work very closely with him. But what happens, you see, without that institutional memory, is that a lot of old bills that, before term limits, never even made it into a committee, much less out of it, are now state law. The idea of local residency requirements created by local governments has been around for a long time. Dennis and I have talked about it off and on for years because he strongly supported it for his city and I didn't support it for mine. But what I did support was the right of that local unit of government to make that determination. If something like a ban on residency requirements would pop up to the legislature back in the 70s and 80s and you'd have some guy like Dominic Jacobetti who served 42 years in the House, who would look at that and say, "Where's the state interest? Where is the compelling state interest? There isn't any state interest. Leave it alone." So if Dennis wants to have a residency requirement and John doesn't, what's the problem with that? I can give you the same story about the CCW [Carrying Concealed Weapons] bill. What you have got is a legislature that turned into a bunch of snoops that want to come in and run local government, and I don't like it. How's that for your answer?

STOKES: *Let's get Tom Hickner and Mr. Wollenbeber back in this discussion. It is an issue that is very much on the minds of Americans and it is one of the questions from the audience. What do you see as the key elements for regional cooperation when it comes to insuring the public health? Is that a regional issue, where does it stop, where does it start in terms of local municipalities, the state, and the federal government?*

HICKNER: Actually I can answer that fairly quickly. Our health director for Bay County was at a meeting this morning with other health directors from the mid-Michi-

gan area to address this very issue because it is clearly on the minds of everyone. Our ability to respond properly is based on collaboration and cooperation between the health directors that have the statutory responsibility and who must share information because this is such a new area that most local officials, including fire chiefs, police chiefs and health directors really do not have as much



Jim Nicholson, Al Lucarelli and CRC Board Member Gene Gargaro talk with U.S. Representative John Dingell during the reception

base knowledge as would be desirable. But fortunately, I think we have the infrastructure to share and the ability to cooperate and it is already being done. This is one area in which the state Department of Community Health has done a fairly good job in doing some preparation. So I am very positive about where we are today and where we will be over the next 12 months in being able to respond to this.

WOLLENWEBER: I pretty much echo his sentiments. Again members of our emergency preparedness staff are in a meeting with state police today to learn from the State some of the things that are in place to tie in some of our local programs, the county health department, and so on.

I would like to follow up on Mayor Logie's comment. It used to be one of Murphy's Laws about the legislature that no one's wife, daughter or pocketbook was safe while the legislature is in session. I don't mean to pick on them but there are so many things that, with the loss of institutional memory, that they are now doing to cities. And it is not things that we are asking them to do to us, it is things that we are having to do to react to them. They are very careful about doing it where they don't have to pay for it, but where we have to pay for it on the receiving end as well.

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*STOKES: If I asked each one of you to name one service that is the easiest to regionalize, or perhaps the best to regionalize, what would you say?*

ARCHER: Transportation.

LOGIE: I would agree with that but, I also think, because of our interconnectedness, water and sewer.

HICKNER: I would say transportation planning. There is definitely a need to do that and I think the possibility exists.

WOLLENWEBER: I'd go with transportation but, I think we also have a challenge in addressing some of the issues SEMCOG has raised and the things that the legislature needs to enact. We also have some success in local funding of the SMART [Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation] system, so there is room to build there. I don't see big changes coming from the legislature, but it would be helpful, when they look at regional issues, if they could provide some limited incentives. There are incentives with respect to water and sewer grants—more points if there are 2 or 3 communities involved. It does not cost them to do these kinds of things, but if they could keep this approach in front of them and look for the incentives, they could create other ways to help us cooperate better. We have got to look to your neighbors, extend a hand, and make sure you know them, share issues, and then try to help on some of those things.

*STOKES: Very quickly the one service that you do not want to, or you feel we should not, regionalize?*

LOGIE: The one that will be impossible is education. Everybody has such an investment in his own school district—emotionally, financially—it will be very, very hard to break those barriers down.

ARCHER: Mayor Logie has talked about what would be in the best interest of his community as it relates to water and sewage. With the election of a person for whom I have high regard as Oakland County Drain Commissioner, Mr. McCullough, and with the spirit of cooperation that I see flowing from a committee, urged by Judge Feikens, that many of us sit on, there will be no regionalization of the Detroit Water Department, but there will be regional cooperation to appreciate the growth in how things must be funded.

WOLLENWEBER: I'd probably say police services. That doesn't mean that there can't be cooperation or that there should not be joint programs such as funding a helicopter, which we do not have in Macomb County, that could be easily done on a regional basis. But, I think police is probably the hardest to do and I would certainly agree with the education comment, because in our own community we have three separate—small and smaller and smallest—school districts, and they just voted overwhelmingly not to consolidate.

*STOKES: Thank you very much to all of our panelists. Thank you to all of you for your participation.*

*Photographs courtesy of Keith Tolman, Ford Photographic, Ford Motor Company*