

# PUBLIC BUSINESS



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## **Simplifying County Government**

Through the activities of the Detroit Citizens' League, the Grand Rapids Citizens' League, and other interested agencies, a constitutional amendment has been proposed in the state legislature that ultimately provides for the simplification of county government in Michigan.

### **Constitutional Amendment**

The wording of the proposed amendment is as follows:

“Section 15A. The Legislature shall provide by a general law for the establishment of charter forms of government in counties, providing that counties may frame, adopt, and amend charters for their self government and amend any existing laws relating to their local organization. But no charter shall become operative in any county until approved by the majority of the electors thereof voting on such question.

When a charter shall become operative in any county, it shall thereupon supersede the existing form of government therein, and the duties, powers, and functions of all prior existing constitutional and statutory offices, officials, and boards of such county, other than judicial offices, shall at once be transferred, vested in, and thereafter exercised by such officers and officials as shall be designated pursuant to such charter.”

### **Procedure Under the Amendment**

Under the proposal made, these five steps are necessary to bring about a change in the government of Wayne County in which Detroit is interested:

1. The legislature, by a two-thirds vote, must permit the people to vote on an amendment to the state constitution.
2. The people of the entire state must approve such amendment, probably at an election in November, 1922.
3. The legislature must then enact laws in harmony with the amendment, outlining the machinery for securing a county charter.
4. Any county wishing a change must act through its officials or popular vote, probably choosing a charter commission to draft a form of county government.
5. The plan proposed by the local charter commission must be approved by a vote of the people of the county.

## Results of the Amendment

The exact effects of this amendment have been summarized in an editorial in the "Detroit Saturday Night" of December 25, 1920:

"No county will be compelled to change its form of government under that amendment. Every county will still be permitted to enjoy just as bad government as the law allows. But any county that is fed up on the kind of comedy that goes for county government in many parts of Michigan will be permitted to frame a county charter to suit itself, within certain limits defined by the state."

## Why Simplification of County Government Seems Desirable

The reasons for simplifying county government are these:

1. *There are too many elective offices in counties.*

Responsibility for the administration of county business is dissipated among a number of elective officers, over which the public has small control. The following table indicates the amount of money appropriated by Wayne County, the City of Detroit, and the Board of Education (excluding judicial officers in all cases) in 1919-20, and the elective officers provided to expend those sums:

Wayne County, An Appropriation of \$9,250,000. Spent by	City of Detroit An Appropriation of \$40,000,000. Spent by	Board of Education, Appropriation of \$30,000,000. Spent by
97 Supervisors	9 Councilmen	7 Inspectors
3 Auditors	1 City Clerk	
3 Road Commissioners	1 City Treasurer	
2 Coroners	1 Mayor	
1 School Commissioner		
1 County Clerk		
1 County Treasurer		
1 Register of Deeds		
1 Drain Commissioner		
1 County Surveyor		
1 Sheriff		
1 Prosecuting Attorney		

(Judicial officers of the city consist of 7 Recorder's Court Judges, 6 Justices of the Peace, and 42 Constables; of the count, 10 Circuit Court Judges, 3 Probate Court Judges, and 2 Circuit Court Commissioners.)

It is maintained that if centralization of authority among a few elective officers in the city will secure a more effective government than formerly prevailed, the same result would be secured by eliminating a large number of elective county officers.

2. *There is no real legislative body for counties.*

For example, in Wayne County the Board of Supervisors is made up of 97 members, many of whom are ex-officio officials of the City of Detroit, and others appointed by the Detroit City Council. This Board of Supervisors meets three times each year, their most important meeting being in November when the annual county budget is passed. As has been said, this is not a deliberative body, but "a convention." In consequence, the important work of arranging the county budget is delegated to a Committee of Ways and Means of 18 members. For all intents and purposes this committee, the members of which are not directly responsible to the electorate, are largely responsible for financing and hence governing the county. The results of this committee's work in 1920 have been termed by two prominent officials as "the worst budget in the history of Wayne County."



During the course of the year no legislation is possible, unless a special meeting of the supervisors is held, which is unusual. In consequence, certain legislative authority is delegated to the Board of Auditors.

3. *There is no responsible head in county government.*

The Board of Auditors have been called the "Kings of the County," but they are kings in name only. These three elective officers do approve many claims against the county and prepare the estimates that are reviewed by the Ways and Means Committee of the Board of Supervisors, and can make emergency appropriations during the course of the year. They also have certain appointive power over a half dozen important officers and audit the accounts of most of the other elective officers, but they have practically no authority over the elective County Road Commission of three members that spends one-half the county budget, and very little authority over the Supervisors of the Poor. They cannot require effective service from a dozen other elective officers. They audit expenditures but they cannot audit operations. No single authority in the county can require that things be done that need to be done.

4. *Certain duplicate services could be eliminated in counties.*

For example, the county surveyor and the county drain commissioner might be readily consolidated with the authority having to do with the construction of roads. A large saving could be effected if there were a single collection of taxes in the county rather than continuing a separate collection of taxes in Detroit and the rest of Wayne County. At present the City of Detroit pays Wayne County \$45,000 a year for collecting Detroit's share of the county taxes, although Detroit maintains a complete tax collecting machinery. Detroit also pays more than \$216,000 to the county for the support of patients at Eloise, as compared with \$17,000 paid by other cities and townships in Wayne County. The state contributes \$320,000 to this institution.

## Objections to County Simplification

The objections made to the proposed simplification of county government are these:

1. *That centralization of authority is undemocratic.*

Some persons believe that a large number of elective officers is preferable to appointing these officers by some elected individual.

The answer to this objection is found in the progress of government towards centralization of authority. Many states are eliminating minor elective officials and most cities are centralizing responsibility in a mayor or in a small city council. In our national government we elect only one administrative officer—the president, and one hears of no objection to this system.

True democracy rests upon choosing able leaders and holding those leaders responsible to public opinion. Democracy does not rest upon the number of elections and the number of elective officials.

2. *That cities will secure a control that now rests with the rural sections in certain counties.*

Through unusual circumstances in one important county the rural district, while being in a minority, elects at least one-half of the Board of Supervisors. A reorganization would doubtless give this rural population only their just proportion of the membership in the county legislative body. There is no answer to this local objection, except that American government is based upon majority rule. If a city contains the largest proportion of the population, in justice it should have the largest membership in the legislative body of the county.

3. *That there is no desire or need for a change in county government in many counties.*

This situation is well recognized by the proponents of the constitutional amendment and for that reason the optional feature of the bill is provided. If the citizens of any county are satisfied with their form of county government they are privileged to continue it as it is.

4. *That this measure is a step in the direction of City-County consolidation, and as such is unsatisfactory to several communities in Wayne County.*

The state organization responsible for the amendment specifically vetoed any wording intended to permit City-County consolidations. Changing the form of the present county government but continuing the same powers that it now has is by no means City-County consolidation. In fact, the present amendment is unsatisfactory in some quarters because it does not permit of this consolidation. Were the government of Wayne County simplified, the governments of Highland Park, Wyandotte and Hamtramck would continue just as they are now and with exactly the same powers. Some day there may be concerted effort for county consolidation in Wayne, but at present, there are so many practical reasons why it cannot be made effective, that such a proposal can only be a matter of academic discussion.

5. *That there will be 83 varieties of county government.*

The legislature will doubtless prescribe only a limited number of types of county government that may be adopted.

There may be valid reasons for some variety and that is one of the recommendations for the proposed amendment. There is necessarily a variety of conditions under which county governments must be administered, depending upon differences in population, as to numbers, whether largely urban or rural, whether manufacturing or agricultural, etc., involving problems of practical administration peculiar to each.

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1. To get things done for Detroit through co-operation with persons who are in office, by increasing efficiency and eliminating waste.

2. To serve as an independent, non-partisan agency for keeping citizens informed about the city's business.

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# Fighting the White Plague

In 1919 there were 927 deaths from tuberculosis in Detroit.

By this it is estimated that there are about 4,000 living cases of tuberculosis in the city. This is neither a minimum nor a maximum estimate, but is based upon an estimate of the number of years a tuberculous patient will live, and upon actual counts of tubercular persons in certain localities.

So the city's program for the treatment of tuberculosis is built around a problem involving 5,000 citizens having a serious, but preventable and curable disease.

Existing hospital facilities include:

Herman Kiefer Hospital .....	126 beds
Detroit Tuberculosis Sanatorium .....	150 beds
Eloise--County Alms House .....	50 beds
Total .....	326 beds

In addition there are five free clinics maintained by the city for the treatment of cases not in hospitals.

The Detroit situation requires at least one hospital bed for each tuberculosis death, or about 1,000 beds instead of 326.

To meet this need there is approaching completion at Northville a tuberculosis sanitarium of 300 beds.

Plans are being prepared for an enlargement to 400 beds; a children's preventorium of 300 beds at Northville; and to increase the tuberculosis division of the Herman Kiefer Hospital to 300 beds.

The entire program contemplates about 1,000 beds.

It may be logically asked,--"What is the good of only 1,000 beds in the presence of 5,000 cases--"

Isolation for 20 per cent of tuberculous cases is the maximum that is now recommended. By this means the community can be protected from virulent cases where satisfactory home treatment is impossible.

The increased development of the tuberculosis activities of the Department of Health means more adequate and in many instances satisfactory care for cases left in the house.

The Board of Education contemplates open air schools to accommodate 660 children, and special rooms for each 1,000 children. The cost of open air school construction is only one-half that of ordinary housing.

These combined activities will probably have the effect of reducing the tuberculosis death rate by one to two per cent a year.