



## Unfinished business

**By Plain Dealer guest columnist**

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**By James C. Roddey**

Pittsburgh -- Congratulations to the community leaders and citizens of Cuyahoga County for their decisive action to bring change to county government. Take note, however, that although the referendum victory was an important milestone in the process of changing governance in the county, the next steps will be crucial in the quest for reform and improved efficiency. There is much unfinished business before those goals can be achieved.

Eleven years ago, Pennsylvania's Allegheny County embarked on the same journey. --Allegheny County now has a decade of experience in being governed by a county council and a county executive. They replaced a three-commissioner system. I had the privilege of helping to enact the referendum giving Allegheny County a home-rule government and, subsequently, to serve as the first elected county chief executive. I believe that the vast majority of Allegheny County citizens would agree that our change of government has been a success. I also believe it could have been even better, had we been more bold in our plans for restructuring. I could list volumes of things to consider during your transition. However, I will limit my recommendations to the following six:

### **Good people make good government.**

Perhaps more important than structure are men and women with intelligence, common sense and integrity. Those with such qualities will maximize the value of changing the Cuyahoga governance system. Recruit candidates that care more about serving their community than about having political careers. Don't let the progress you have made to date be hijacked by those who will use any system of government for self-serving purposes.

### **Use the occasion of a new form of governance to review and evaluate every function performed by county government.**

In Allegheny County, we empowered a transition team of more than 500 citizens to look at every department of county government and recommend changes. Thirty-two separate reports by the transition teams provided 800 recommendations. More than 700 have been implemented.

These volunteers came from every sector of our county and were balanced geographically and by age and gender. Eighty percent had never been involved in government, but most had experience running a business, a labor union, a department of a company or a nonprofit organization. Fifty-four percent of the committee members were women and 34 percent were minorities. The political composition of this nonpartisan committee was 52 percent Democrats, 32 percent Republicans and 16 percent independents. The only requirements were to be a registered voter and reside in the county.

### **Consider privatization and consolidation where appropriate and practical.**

Such functions as fleet management, public transit and county-owned nursing homes are good candidates for consideration.

Also consider functional consolidation of certain services with the Cleveland city government. Good prospects are public works and purchasing.

### **Reduce the size of the county's work force.**

If the number of approximately 8,000 is correct, Cuyahoga has far too many workers for its size. (Allegheny County has around 5,500.) A 25 percent reduction would put Cuyahoga County at the median of employment among counties of similar size and would result in a significant lowering of cost of personnel. The pushback will be that you should not cut jobs when you have high unemployment. Nevertheless, the purpose of government is not to provide employment but rather to provide good and efficient services. Requiring taxpayers to fund more jobs than is required to meet this standard is not a good government practice.

### **Create a system of transparency.**

No function of government should be shielded from scrutiny by the public.

### **Create a strong and enforceable code of ethics.**

Unethical behavior/practices by elected and appointed officials do more to undermine confidence in government than any other circumstance.

Cuyahoga County is at the halfway point of creating significant and positive change in its government structure. Don't lose your momentum. Finish the journey with courage and determination to have a county government of which you can be proud.

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