

VERMILION COUNTY MAYORS' COUNCIL

QUARTERLY MEETING / ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

THURSDAY, JULY 28, 2011

Attendance: See Sign In sheet

- Senator Frerichs was invited to provide his update first so that he could leave early:
 - This year's budget resolution activity was the best he has seen in 5 years, as both sides in the house worked together to find compromise; he observed time being spent on determining what the legislature has to spend before anyone looked at how to spend it; a good product came out of the house - the senate was a different, more challenging event
 - He recognizes that likely the number 1 concern for mayors was the threats made to the Local Distributive Fund; he feels the Illinois Municipal League (IML) has unduly scared mayors all over the state until this year, when the threat was real; cutting these funds was seriously considered for the first time this year, although in the end, the dollars were not removed; he does think this will be an area that will have to be watched in upcoming budget talks
 - The Supreme Court decision regarding the capital bill should free up badly needed dollars for improvements across the state
 - The IML put forth several bills this past session; however, from his reading, he does not see any that originated in Vermilion County so in order to save time he will not go over them
- Since time allowed, the senator remained at the meeting as Representative Hays offered some of his comments:
 - He expressed his sincere hope that the budget process Senator Frerichs referred to continues into the future, for he believes it is the only way we can work through the budget crisis we face; the House came together and worked through their issues in a bi-partisan manner; this was a fair, solid approach that was realistic and productive
 - He was very outspoken about the Local Distributive Fund; he knows all too well how significant that money is to local budgets, having been the mayor of Catlin; the proposed changes would have been unfair, and everyone must remain vigilant to avoid this being approved in the future
 - The business climate in Illinois must improve; we experienced only minimal worker's comp reform this year and it is not enough; we must see changes in causation and common standards
 - The county put forth an excellent presentation to the governor about the gambling expansion bill, articulating the need here; he gave them more of his time than expected, and he listened to what they said; the governor himself said the community made a very good case, and although he still has issues with the legislation, he does not appear to have issues with a casino in Danville; the representative says he thinks the best possible situation now is for a clarification of the governor's issues, and then introduce trailer legislation in the fall

- session that can address the concerns; this is an economic development issue for our community; and while he is not comfortable with building a future on gambling, a casino will create hundreds of well-paying local jobs, and it is his belief that there is little that so positively impacts families in a community than the creation of jobs
- Hays and Frerichs visited Sunrise Coal this week and they see opportunities ahead with this project; they remain on schedule for opening a coal mine that will create hundreds of long-term, very well-paying jobs - with the average employee making \$65-70,000/year; the mine will also bring rail power; and at the end of its life, Sunrise will leave an industrial site that can be re-developed
 - The representative joined the senator in applauding the court's ruling regarding the capital bill; it is a decision that can impact many projects
 - There was a general question/answer session and then the senator departed; the representative remained for some follow-up discussion:
 - Is there any chance local communities will ever get the funds owed to them by the state or is that money likely to disappear?
 - Representative Hays answered he does not know; the impact of these late or non-existent payments is significant on all communities and on small business - any small business that works with the state on anything is getting hurt badly because the money for their services/products, etc is not coming in - how can you operate your business this way and survive? This puts small business at great risk, as it does local governments; and this is grossly unfair, because local government learned long ago how to operate within their means, and are now being punished by a state that does not know how to control its spending
 - Representative Hays says he has many examples of the impact of an out of control worker's comp system; many local businesses who also have operations in Indiana see a vast difference between the dollars they pay in Illinois and in Indiana - we simply must address this issue
 - Representative Hays says he thinks we will continue to see threats to the Local Distributive Fund, and the potential loss of dollars that rightfully go to our local communities
 - There was brief discussion in the legislature by those who likely did not understand potential impact, about revoking the sales tax exemption on ag products; this could have been devastating in a state surrounded by agriculture business - it likely would have put many out of business in Illinois
 - Reference was made to the new map that will cut Vermilion County into three districts; Representative Hays is adamantly opposed to this division of the county and stated, as he has said to Senator Frerichs himself, he does not think the new map is fair to the residents of Vermilion County; nor does he think the changes to the Congressional map are fair either, since both are very large, covering huge areas of the state with varying needs; map changes go into effect January 2013.
 - The veto session will occur the last of October; he expects to see some overrides; the ROE situation (no funding) has got to be addressed; representative Hays says the offices are statutory and cannot be wiped out by the governor - to not fund them is unconscionable;

- the move to cut school transportation funds is equally wrong, since local school districts will have to carry that load in already strained budgets; the transportation issue was discussed in the House and rejected as not a suitable approach to state budget issues, yet the governor went ahead and moved in that direction, so this will need to be addressed.
- Representative Hays and Senator Frerichs reminded everyone that this is a good time to talk to them; they are able to hold more regular office hours during the summer than they are when in session in Springfield, so please feel free to contact them
 - Doug Toole from the Vermilion County Health Department and Tammy Bennet from FOTH presented an update on the Vermilion County Brownfield grant project; the county received \$400,000 to identify sites in the county that may need to be evaluated for contamination; if they are contaminated, funding may be obtained to do the clean-up necessary to make them useable for economic development - if they are not contaminated, then they can be offered for economic development; they will collect data till September; they already have over 200 sites on their list- many of them potentially housing underground tanks that may be leaking; but even with those already on the list, they need more sites to be identified so they can be sure the most serious are identified and potentially corrected
 - Around the table, mayors gave brief updates:
 - Rossville continues to work on its water project; Hoopeston Hospital's new medical clinic project continues on schedule; Rossville's homecoming street dance will be August 6th
 - Hoopeston Hospital's expansion project is underway; work on the new nursing home and assisted living facility on the city's north side is to get underway in August; the McDonald's project is moving forward - some walls blew down but have been put back up and work continues to replace the existing building; the city continues to seek funding for its water tank improvement project; it is difficult for small communities to find the funding they need for projects like this; they have appreciated the help they have gotten from Vermilion Advantage in getting money for water lien work for the nursing home project; the Hoopeston Hospital has purchased the old Paxton hospital - media has indicated this will be for a federally qualified health center - this project is not tied to the merger with Carle - not is the nursing home project; plans are being unveiled for a \$4 million licensed assisted living facility in Hoopeston, which will be located in the city's TIF district; the community is seeing potentially rapid growth in the healthcare field - it is now the largest employer in Hoopeston with 275 jobs and more to come
 - In Ridge Farm, they are focused on the new Village Hall project, with hopes to break ground soon; August 26 and 27 the community will host a tractor pull - should be a good draw for people and good fun
 - In Fairmount, they are working on the new fire station that is being built with volunteers; the funds were just not there to have it built, so the community stepped up; it will also act as a new community center for the 642 people who live in Fairmount; the community has invested a great deal of time and effort to build the station
 - Work in Georgetown continues on the 20 year sewer improvement project; with little funding available, few projects are currently being planned for the community; the fair opens August 6th

- There was a question from Mayor Crusinberry about vacant and deteriorating buildings - how do communities handle this issue? Everyone struggles with it, especially because of the expense involved; who is responsible? Taxing bodies? It is a great concern in terms of the impact on other buildings and the community as well as the liability. Perhaps we can have some further discussion on this at a future meeting; anyone with suggestions for meeting topics should contact chair Mayor Lucas at dlucassr@yahoo.com or Linda Bolton at lbolton@vermilionadvantage.com
- Mayor Simmons moved and Mayor Crusinberry seconded adjournment.

**Next Mayors' Council meeting will be 6pm,
Thursday, October 27, 2011
in the 1st floor conference room of
Vermilion Advantage, 28 W North Street, in Danville**