

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

The proof is in the pudding; is our county administrator worth over \$50,000?

Discussion of the duties and effectiveness of our current county administrator deserves to be front and center, as unpleasant as it may be for Administrator Alan Hallberg and the county board. The issue of county government not having enough revenue to provide county services is nothing new. Federal and State governments again facing serious budget shortfalls will effect our local governments' financial outlook even more.

I've always been an advocate of the position of a county administrator. The title is not important. As a county board member for two terms, I could see the advantages of one person assisting the chairman and committees implement their policies, doing research, paperwork, legwork and negotiations and being accessible on a daily basis. Board chairmen and members are volunteers who earn \$35 per diem for meetings and if rural, mileage for attending meetings. Committee chairs and the board

chairman spend a great deal of time working on county board problems with no pay.

Not having been involved in county government for five or six years, I don't know all that has transpired between the county administrator, elected officials and the county board. One of the key wishes of the board, however, was that a county administrator communicate with elected officials to institute central purchasing. Some offices jointly order copy paper, for example, but money would certainly be saved by one order of supplies for all county offices and entities.

We have to ask. Has Hallberg ever approached the various offices and entities about central purchasing? Granted, it would have to be done with a great deal of diplomacy and ability to persuade. Does Hallberg have those traits? Another wish of the county board was that an administrator would work on grants for county programs.

Has this been done? Was it successful? Was Hallberg responsible for the grant money or did someone else have the knowledge and do the work?

Next question: What does Hallberg do all day? I have four months of his reports to the county board wherein he lists only the meetings he has attended. Frankly, I don't think his attendance at the installation of the Knox College president or meetings of United Way and Leadership Greater Galesburg further the cause of Knox County government. In 13 years of being sole proprietor of my marketing and public relations business, when I presented a bill to my client I reported not just conversations and meetings but the purpose of my efforts and what was accomplished. This report was to justify their paying me. I certainly felt I had to produce results because that's why I was hired.

So that's what the county board should be asking Mr. Hallberg, what have you accomplished? Considering the goals of our board, where do we stand? What have you done that wouldn't have been accomplished otherwise?

This week I had a long conversation with Dick Erickson, Administrative Assistant to the Henry County Board for the past 23 years. He met with our county board committee before the position of "county administrator" was established and has met with Hallberg. County Board Chair Sally Keener wanted committees of the board abolished because Hallberg was in place. Erickson works with eight committees of the Henry County Board, so that should not be an issue.

Erickson said, "The county board has certain statutory duties and I assist the board in the performance of those duties. I implement the policies and give advice when it's wanted. The other county officials must see that I can help them, so I have to build bridges." He said that he reflects the positions of the county board and can be reached on a daily basis.

"The board gives me a clear understanding of what is wanted," said Erickson. "I try to give them the best information for the good of the whole county. I deal with issues of the county board that span all county offices and tie that together with the common good. Of course, budget issues are our main thrust all year."

Erickson added, "Unless the board puts a seal of approval on an action or implementation, it won't work." Erickson said that his job description changes somewhat over the years, because needs and problems change. Erickson has monthly meetings with department heads, something State's Attorney Paul Mangleri has just suggested. I would think that would have been first on the board's and Hallberg's



agenda a year and a half ago. Erickson reiterated that he and department heads meet even if there is nothing urgent to discuss.

Erickson says, "The full board has always given full support and confidence in the (county board) committees."

This critical confidence in committee work has been eroded on the Knox County Board since the mid-1990s.

Erickson said that he and committees get so much accomplished before the board meetings that they sometimes last only 35 minutes. "There are no fiascos on county board meeting night."

While he was unfamiliar with any specifics of Knox County and the performance, or lack thereof, of its administrator, Erickson talked about how important it was for him to be apolitical, to be totally removed from the politics of the board and its members. He has obviously been able to accomplish this.

This is not something Hallberg has been able to do, especially after his and the county board chairman's unsuccessful attempt to remove duties and a job from the county treasurer's office just to "give Hallberg something to do." No matter what anyone says, this was viewed as a very political move by Republican party leaders who just lost the Treasurer's office to a Democrat.

The effort was ill-advised and a bad idea, with no concern of what was best for county government functions.

If Hallberg can't prove his worth after 18 months and the board can't figure out what he should be doing, we'd better give up the position for now and make available over \$50,000 for county services which are proven to be basic and necessary.

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