April 30, 2008

To Whom it May Concern:

I read with great interest and scrutiny Sarah Leibel's Honors College Thesis entitled, "The Evolution of Government Consolidation in Indianapolis-Marion County." Overall, I found her thesis to be a very concise, organized documentation of how this concept took root, the routes and obstacles it has gone through over the years since its inception and where it stands now.

Particularly helpful to the reader, was the fact that Sarah began at a basic level of explaining the functions and goals of local government and gradually added events and public perception that changed how those functions and goals should continue to be met as Indianapolis and Marion County changed and grew over the years. She accurately documented in chronological order the steps our City and County has taken to consolidate services and functions. What can seem to be an overwhelming issue to an average citizen not involved in local government, she broke down into logical, easy to understand concepts.

Another feature I thought was important which Sarah included, was the fact that she discussed what some other states have done with regard to local government consolidation and what factors determined their successes and/or failures. It was important that she cover this aspect, since that is a common denominator used in passing new state legislation. If a new law is passed and becomes successful and popular in one state, then its likelihood of passing in another similar state is increased, and that is the relevance of including statistics and information from other state legislation.

Local government consolidation is such a huge, complex and controversial issue that is difficult to cover in a short thesis. As Sarah referenced, many books, articles and studies have been done on the issue, and policymakers are still perfecting and adjusting consolidation language. It was clear to me that Sarah gained a comprehensive, thorough understanding of this issue and was able to communicate what she learned through her thesis in a very reader-friendly manner.

Please contact me if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

James W. Merritt, Jr.
State Senator
The Evolution of Government Consolidation in Indianapolis-Marion County

Sarah Leibel
Honors College Thesis
May 2008
The Evolution of Government Consolidation in Indianapolis-Marion County

Sarah Leibel

Abstract:

Since the inception of the Unigov government in 1970, the Consolidated City of Indianapolis-Marion County has been a model of government consolidation in the Midwest. What began as a way of revitalizing downtown Indianapolis and drawing people back to the city has evolved into a county-wide project with the potential to save current Hoosiers millions of dollars in tax money if the correct programs are adopted and implemented. In this thesis, I take an in-depth look at government consolidation as a theory and the practical ways that it has been applied to Indianapolis-Marion County. Once a solid foundation of the principles is established, the thesis moves specifically to Indiana to further study the various consolidation efforts of the last 40 years. Moving from Unigov to Indianapolis Works and finally through the most current legislative session of the General Assembly, this thesis offers a comprehensive study of government consolidation and how it has evolved in Indianapolis-Marion County and will continue to change in the future.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to begin by thanking State Senator James Merritt, Jr. for introducing me to this policy area and offering his support and assistance as I made my way through this thesis. It was an internship with him during the 2008 General Assembly session that I was able to witness the legislative process firsthand and watch him maneuver this process in order to further consolidate Indianapolis-Marion County. With this, I would also like to express my gratitude to Dawna Smith, assistant to Senator Merritt, who helped me to understand the process on a more practical level and apply the ideas that I was learning every day. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Hollands from Ball State University for offering his continuing support and feedback on this internship and my thesis.
Principles of Government Consolidation

Government consolidation is an idea that has been around since the 1920s as the lines between services on the city and county level were blurring. People did not want to live in densely populated urban areas, but they still wanted to receive the public service benefits that come with living in a larger city. Typically speaking, cities are responsible for providing police and fire protection, public works, parks and recreation, tax collection and economic development. Conversely, county governments act as an arm of the state government and provided the court system, jails, tax assessment and human services. As larger cities started to expand, county governments started to take over more duties. People found that counties were able to perform the same services as efficiently as those at the municipal level. In general, the idea of government consolidation was started by a desire to provide more efficient public services for people throughout the county, not just those in the city limits.

When a particular city decides that it should consolidate with its corresponding county, there are two main forms of government consolidation from which to choose. Political leaders will look at the two levels of government and bring them together to study the services provided by each level. Then they determine if that entity is the most efficient way to deliver the service. The first form of consolidation is called functional consolidation. In this form, some, but not all, of the governmental functions are unified and services are performed by the level of government that is best suited to provide them. In this way, there is just one entity providing services and duplication of services is eliminated. There are still technically two separate governments, but they share the performance of duties for the citizens. One reason that this is a popular method of consolidation is because structurally, the governments stay the
same but financially, there is a wider tax base in a county from which to levy taxes. It is also a popular method because the parts of government that are easiest to consolidate are the ones that are least visible to the public, therefore encouraging the least emotional resistance. For example, it is easiest to consolidate functions like personnel services, finance, public works and planning. These are areas that produce the greatest economies of scale through consolidation, but are not in the limelight to the public. One common problem with functional cooperation comes when the governments are forced to deal with issues that cross jurisdictional lines and cannot be easily delegated to one specific entity. A step up from functional consolidation is structural or full consolidation, in which the separate city and county governments are merged into one single governing body. No entities in the United States have performed a complete structural consolidation although some have come close. Indianapolis-Marion County is a version of structural consolidation in that the city and county governments were merged into one consolidated city, but because of the provision which excludes Speedway, Beech Grove, Southport and Lawrence, it was not a full consolidation. In fact, this is usually the case when a city merges with its county; other smaller municipalities are given the option to merge or remain separate. This new governing body is called a City-County Council and it oversees the work and services of the municipal city as well as the surrounding county. Because each municipality is so different, it is often hard to classify cities as strictly performing one type of consolidation. So, rather than thinking of them as Type A or Type B, the various forms of consolidation better serve to function as benchmarks in a spectrum of consolidation ranging from functional consolidation in which the governments coordinate services all the way to full consolidation in which one entire entity is absorbed by another.
According to a study done in Pennsylvania, there are a few characteristics of successful mergers that seem to be indicative of consolidation in general. The Pennsylvania Economy League conducted a study entitled “A Comparative Analysis of City/County Consolidation” and its main focus was researching the consolidation of city-county governments around the country in order to see if it would work well with their particular demographic and situation. They found that despite the fact that consolidation efforts fail far more often than they succeed, if five attributes are present, the merger will most likely be relatively successful. First, they tend to be most successful if the consolidation effort can be put into the state constitution or is somehow mandated by the legislature. For example, in some places, if the population reaches a certain number in a city, then the constitution mandates a consolidation effort in the city and county. Additionally, they found that if the consolidated city retains separate taxation and service districts for the former city and for the suburban/rural areas it would likely succeed. The normal county-level services like courts, jail and human services will be uniformly provided throughout the county and this is called the General Service District. Within this, the Urban Service District typically has the same boundaries as the former city and receives a heightened level of services or an additional set of municipal services that are not provided to the entire county. These upgraded services are paid for through a supplemental tax on just the taxpayers in the Urban Service District. Next, they usually are successful if one of the governments was in a financial crisis and the reorganization will eliminate or reduce this burden. In this way, the county or city can absorb the debt of the smaller entity and draw from their increased population and tax base to make up for the difference. Also, when there is some form of government corruption that has taken place, many cities find that the best way to combat the
corruption is to reshape the government and present the public with a new form of government. This usually makes the consolidation very popular with the people because they feel that the old form of government was the original cause of the corruption. The next characteristic of successful consolidation is strong leadership at the local level. Many times the political leaders that are already in place do not step up for such consolidation efforts because they have put strong efforts behind the existing government. By having strong local leadership to aide in the transition, this has been consistent with a successful merger. Finally, government consolidations have been most successful when they have continued to leave school districts out of the equation. Most states have independent school districts and boards that do not connect to any other political boundaries and it has always worked out the best when the school districts are left to their own devices and not drawn into the whole consolidation effort. Keeping all these characteristics in mind, it is important to understand the spectrum of positions that people can take when deciding the merits of government consolidation in general.

Overall, there are various attitudes about whether or not government consolidation in general is a positive idea. As with any public administration restructuring idea, there are going to be side effects that greatly impact all the people involved in the plan. After reading the various stances presented in the Pennsylvania study, there were similar attitudes found in West Virginia where they were going through a similar situation of deciding whether or not to consolidate. The Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research published a report entitled “Local Government Consolidation: Lessons for West Virginia” to present to the West Virginia legislature in order to determine the appropriateness of consolidation. To start
positively, the main goal of government consolidation is improved efficiency of services and streamlining government; there is dramatically reduced duplication of services. It is this very reduction that causes the financial savings attributed to government consolidation. It eliminates competition and contradictions among agencies and departments. There is usually just one taxing entity, one law enforcement agency and this cutback is what triggers the economic savings. But, as will be discussed further, these financial benefits do not fully materialize until a few years after the consolidation is complete. Another positive attribute of government consolidation is that it makes the whole metropolitan area more attractive for federal aid. In larger governmental units, like a consolidated city-county, they may be eligible for more grants that are unavailable to smaller jurisdictions and they have the required staffs to follow through on such endeavors. Another positive effect of consolidation is that it reduces annexation problems within the region. When people move to suburbs just outside the city, they are able to enjoy the benefits of living near the city but do not contribute to its financial support. If a city can consolidate with the county surrounding it, it will help eliminate the chances of people moving to outlying neighborhoods and avoiding the city taxes. With this idea, government consolidation also brings improved services for the area, especially rural and suburban parts that may have been previously overlooked by both the city and the county. Finally, a positive side effect of consolidation is that it gives the region a political upgrade and it renews the image of a particular metropolitan area. This new way of governing may help in attracting new businesses and the population may become invigorated by the change in government.
Now, while all of that paints a nice picture for government consolidation, there are pitfalls to this policy area and consequences that need to be fully considered before any consolidation takes place. First, critics of government consolidation remain concerned that the high original cost of the transition is never fully reimbursed by the long term savings. Also, if the government saves any money, the profits are minimal and could possibly have been achieved by making smarter purchasing decisions. Additionally, people involved with larger government often feel that such a big government is unapproachable and it loses a sense of identity for the area. Small, local governments foster a sense of identity and personal interaction in the communities and when those governments are absorbed by a larger entity, people feel like they lose a certain form of participation in their community. People in the community get lost in the shuffle and no longer feel like they have any voice in the way services are provided. Another potential downside to political consolidation would be the obvious downsizing in government jobs and elected positions. Some may see this as the very crux in an argument for consolidation, but critics see the jobs as crucial to the local government, especially in smaller towns throughout a county. When consolidation does happen, it is rural residents that feel most alienated and would likely lose their jobs. Finally, it is true that when government consolidation happens, the initial costs are high and for a number of reasons. There will be initial costs of extending services to the more rural areas of a county and existing services like roads, water and sewage facilities will need to be upgraded to accommodate the increase. Also, it costs money to design and create new institutions and switch people around in their jobs. New positions and job titles will be created or altered and often new operating systems will need to be installed and taught. In general, there are some important benefits and
drawbacks that should be equally considered when looking at consolidating city and county
government.
Consolidation under Unigov

Government consolidation found its way to Indiana in the late 1960s. People in Indianapolis were consistently moving from the urban district downtown to the suburbs and the city needed to bring these people back. Instead of formally annexing these areas so that they could continue to receive city services, Indianapolis kept creating separate municipal corporations in that area in order to still provide urban public services. In 1967, the U.S. Census actually recorded sixty different governments within Marion County which included twenty-three cities and towns, nine townships, eleven school districts and sixteen special-purpose governments. But due to continuing battles between the Democrats and Republicans in the city and county governments, all efforts at consolidation in Marion County seemed to stall because of party politics. Democrats typically controlled the city government of Indianapolis while Republicans continuously controlled the Marion County Government. After an unexpected split in the Democratic Party that occurred in 1968, it was easy for the Republicans to make their move. Democratic Party Chairman James Beatty chose to run against his own party’s incumbent mayor, John Barton for the Democrat nomination. Local Democrats were thus divided and Republican Richard Lugar was able to edge out John Barton in the general election to win the Mayor’s office. A Republican Action Committee began having secret meetings and studying other government consolidations around the country. They looked extensively at Nashville-Davidson County and Jacksonville-Duval County, Florida in order to begin creating the plans for an Indianapolis-Marion County consolidation. Coincidentally in 1968, the Republican Party also rose to power across the state by winning the governor’s office
and both chambers of the General Assembly which gave the Republicans the chance to forever alter Marion County government without the usual obstacle of partisan politics\textsuperscript{13}.

Thus, in 1970 by an act of the Indiana General Assembly the city of Indianapolis expanded its borders to include all of Marion County with four small exceptions. Speedway, Beechgrove, Lawrence and Southport would continue to vote for Mayor and Councils in their own cities and towns but they were also eligible to vote for the Mayor and City-County Council of Indianapolis. Keeping in mind the background information on government consolidation, Marion County consolidated with Indianapolis through the power of the state legislature, which immediately sets it apart from most city-county consolidations\textsuperscript{14}. Usually, these are accomplished by a referendum posed to the voters but in Indiana, it was an act of the General Assembly. Nonetheless, on January 1, 1970, the city of Indianapolis was officially changed into the Consolidated City of Indianapolis-Marion County through an altered form of structural consolidation. As stated before, structural or full consolidation occurs when the city and county governments totally merge in a single political entity with one government structure. In the case of Marion County, because of the excluded towns previously mentioned, it was not a full consolidation but it was a close alternative. It is mandated by the Indiana Constitution that all cities with a population greater than 5,000 people employ the Mayor-Council form of government so that is precisely what was drawn by the legislature\textsuperscript{15}.

This new consolidated government was divided into three branches, identical to the federal government of executive, legislative and judicial. The first branch is the executive and there are actually three levels of executive power within this new government structure. First,
at the city level is the Mayor’s office and the Indianapolis Controller. Under a consolidated
government, the power and prestige of the Mayor’s office grows substantially and Indianapolis
is no exception. The Mayor’s office now consists of the Mayor and his executive staff. This
staff is comprised of a Chief of Staff, Deputy Mayor for Public Policy, Deputy Mayor for
Neighborhoods, several assistant Deputy Mayors, Director of Media and Communications,
Director of Council Relations and Director of Constituent Services. According to the Unigov
Handbook produced by the League of Women Voters, the Mayor’s office “directs the
administrative functions and programs of a city government.” It also assists the state and
federal offices on various projects and presents an annual city government budget to the
Council for approval. Also within the city division of the executive branch are five departments
each led by a director: Department of Administration, Department of Metropolitan
Development, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Safety and
Department of Public Works. Beneath these departments are the various city agencies who
answer ultimately to the directors of the five departments.

Moving on from the city level, but still within the executive branch is township
government. Unigov provided that there are various elected positions at the township level
that should remain intact. First, and most controversial in the most recent legislative session,
are the township assessors who are elected by the township to a four-year term. The township
assessor is responsible for the “assessment of real and personal property for taxation.” The
township assessor certifies property values to the county auditor for preparation of tax bills.
With the assessor is the township trustee whose main responsibilities are to oversee fire
operations and to provide general assistance to the poor, known as “poor relief.” The trustee
is also elected by the township to a four year term. Additionally, there is a township constable who serves summonses, warrants and subpoenas enforcing the decisions of the small claims courts. Finally, at the township level of the executive branch is the Advisory Board which is a seven-member board responsible for holding two meetings per year, one in the trustee’s office and one to adopt the budget, but they may call special meetings as necessary.

The third and final level of the executive branch is the county level and it is the area of government with the least flexible blueprint for further consolidation. Most of the county level seats are constitutionally mandated elected positions. Regardless, at the county level are the assessor, auditor, clerk, coroner, prosecutor, recorder, sheriff, surveyor, treasurer and the Office of Family and Children. In addition to these various elected positions are county boards that oversee particular policy areas like elections or voter registration. To pull all of this back into focus, at the executive branch of Unigov is the city, including the mayor and the various city departments and there is also the township level and county offices that have their own elected officials but are technically still part of the city government.

Moving on from the executive, the legislative branch was changed to the City-County Council. This new Council is made up of twenty-nine members. Twenty-five are from district representation and there are four at-large members from all over the county. Each of these members is elected to a four-year term. The most important way that the Council has an impact is through its committee system, which operates in much the same way as the federal bill process of getting legislation passed. Within this system, there are three permanent committees and nine standing committees. It also has three special service district councils.
These permanent committees are the Committee on Rules and Public Policy, Committee on Committees and Committee of the Whole\(^{22}\). While these may seem like repetitive, unnecessary agencies, they actually serve important different purposes. The Committee on Committees is in charge of naming the members of the various standing committees. The Committee on Rules and Public Policy considers proposed changes to the rules of the City-County Council and functions like a standing committee on any matter referred to them by the President or the Council. The Committee on the Whole includes every member of the Council and meets when the public is entitled to a public hearing. The nine standing committees include one for each city department and they have the power to review and investigate various policies and expenditures of their respective departments. Additionally, there is a standing committee on Finance, Economic Development, Municipal Corporations and Community Affairs. Again referring to the Unigov Handbook, the Fire Special Service District, the Police Special Service District and the Solid Waste Special Service District act on matters pertaining to their individual districts.\(^{23}\)

In terms of duties and authority, the City-County Council has the exclusive power to adopt the budget, levy taxes and make appropriations for the city. It also enacts, repeals, and amends the local laws which are called ordinances. All ordinances must be formally introduced by a Council member and then assigned to a committee for consideration. This committee will hold a public meeting for citizen input. Once the meeting is held, the committee will table it (meaning let it die) or they will bring it before the whole Council with a recommendation to pass it or not. If it is passed by the entire Council, it is sent to the Mayor for a signature or veto, but the Council may override a veto with a two-thirds majority vote.\(^{24}\)
Interestingly enough, the court system in Marion County was not changed at all by the Unigov consolidation and still is a branch of the Marion County government. The Indiana Supreme Court is still the highest court above the Indiana Court of Appeals which has four districts. Below the Court of Appeals is the Marion County Court System. This is made up of a Circuit Court with one judge serving for six years. With this is the Marion County Superior Court with its four divisions: Civil, Criminal, Probate and Juvenile. The Superior Court has thirty-two judges also elected to six-year terms. The third division of the Courts in Marion County is the small claims court that takes place at the township level. There are eight small claims courts; one in each township except Franklin. Each court has jurisdiction in all civil cases where the claim does not exceed $6,000. There are no jury trials in the small claims courts and all appeals go directly to the civil division of the Marion County Superior Court.

Now that there is a basic understanding of the government under Unigov, it is important to understand the benefits and consequences that resulted from such a massive restructuring effort. In regards to Unigov as a whole, it is almost as interesting to look at what was left out of the consolidation efforts as opposed to what was apparently consolidated. Even after this immense restructuring movement there are still more than fifty taxing units and numerous special service districts that still exist, which cause people to question the thoroughness and overall success of this government overhaul. First, it is important to understand the specific organizations that were intentionally omitted from Unigov. There are four municipalities that have already been discussed briefly as the “excluded cities and towns.” Beech Grove, Lawrence, Speedway and Southport are four local governments that provide several services directly to their residents and since they have populations greater than 5,000 people, they were
not forced to fully consolidate. But, because they pay county taxes and receive some of county services, they are still permitted to vote for the Unigov Mayor, a district City-County Council member and the four at-large Council members. Aside from these “excluded cities and towns”, there are still seventeen municipalities that were technically consolidated into the new city, but are allowed to retain their town status and may maintain governments, levy property taxes and provide their own local services, in addition to the services provided by the city and county.

Now, most of these municipalities do not still have their own governments, but the fact that they have this power calls into question the true point of forcing them to consolidate in the first place. By allowing towns and cities to retain their own governments and service providers, it undermines the effectiveness of the consolidation and diminishes the ultimate goal of eliminating duplication of services.

Another interesting facet of government that was excluded from Unigov was all of the township government. As stated before, there are still nine township governments that exist in Marion County. These governments include the township assessor, trustee and advisory board. With this, there are still eleven independent school districts in Marion County, each with its own budget and policy within the Indiana Code. There are also independent municipal corporations that have remained untouched by Unigov. For example, the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation, the Airport Authority and Capital Improvement Board were all able to remain independent despite all the shuffling that occurred with Unigov. It is hard to call Unigov true government consolidation when there are still so many independent entities that were permitted to remain viable and autonomous even after the consolidation was fully in effect. Instead of eliminating any layers
of government, responsibilities were simply shifted around and some names may have been changed, but it is hard to find layers and institutions that were really streamlined into the new government.

As stated before, one of the most questionable aspects of Unigov is the fact that nothing happened by way of county government or the Marion County Court System. Granted, the positions in question are constitutionally mandated positions that would require an amendment to change, but surely there are extraneous positions that are not elected that could have been consolidated, or staff that could be eliminated. Finally, the jurisdiction of the Indianapolis Police and Fire Departments were changed very little by the Unigov legislation. Some parts of the Sheriff's Department merged with the Indianapolis Police Department, but there are still various responsibilities and positions that the Marion County Sheriff performs independently of the Indianapolis Police Department and vice versa. In terms of fire consolidation, each of the townships has an independent fire department separate from the Indianapolis Fire Department and there is also an Airport Fire Department and special service fire districts that were untouched by Unigov. As one can see, while Unigov did make great strides by structurally consolidating the actual government in downtown Indianapolis, there are still many agencies and areas that could have also benefitted from consolidation. There were certain departments that were avoided that perhaps should have been included in the original legislation.
Success of Unigov

After an in-depth look at the consolidated government under Unigov, in combination with the blatant omissions from the plan, it begs the question, what was the point and was Unigov successful? Did it go far enough?

The original purposes of Unigov were to streamline a government that had become a tangled web of bureaucracy, to financially consolidate two government entities and to provide improved services to its citizens. In this way, it was the hopes of the Unigov trailblazers to revive this increasingly quiet city and show businesses and people in general that Indianapolis was a progressive, forward-moving city. Keeping this in mind, in my opinion, Unigov was a relative success. Downtown Indianapolis received a major facelift due to the strengthening of the Mayor’s office. Using a combination of city-county participation, public funding and public authority, the Mayor was able to initiate such developments as Market Square Arena, Merchants Plaza, Hoosier Dome, the Indianapolis Convention Center and the Circle Centre Mall. All of these developments helped to revive the actual downtown area and draw people back into the city for recreation, instead of relying on suburbs of neighboring comparable cities, like Cincinnati or Louisville. With such a powerful Mayor both administratively and monetarily, they were able to really delve into public and private partnerships; something for which Indianapolis has become known thanks to Mayors Lugar and Hudnut. Instead of using government funding to provide services to constituents, Indianapolis began contracting out these jobs to private corporations. This privatization helped to achieve two of the goals of Unigov. It saved the city money and the private corporations provided better services to people. Additionally, in the years immediately following Unigov, the consolidated city was able
to attract much more federal funding than it had in the past decades. Much of this was due to the fact that, because the population had grown by including all of Marion County, Indianapolis was now eligible for many more grants for which smaller jurisdictions do not qualify. Also, the Mayors in the years immediately following Unigov were much more aggressive in seeking federal funding and the Republicans in downtown Indianapolis had a very positive relationship with the federal executive. Mayor Lugar was a close confidant to President Nixon and Indianapolis was the largest city governed by Republicans for nearly twenty years after the inception of Unigov. In conclusion, there were some immediate benefits to the consolidation of government in Marion County, but there were still consequences that need to be studied and understood in order to get a comprehensive look at this movement.

First and most glaring to the tax payers in Indianapolis was that there was still an antiquated and confusing tax structure in place with many overlapping service districts because of the various exceptions to the Unigov consolidation. Instead of really consolidating any layers of government, the City-County Council found it beneficial to make a new special service district for every new endeavor of the city. Also, the people in Center Township were still paying a much higher city tax because now the city has extended its services but not its tax base which created great disparities within the various districts throughout the county. This area pays for the county-wide services plus all municipal services, but the base has not been extended beyond the old city boundaries. Because of this fact, there are a relatively small number of people paying for the extension of services all over the county. Another potential downfall to this Unigov government is that it did not make the government much simpler and there were still ultimately the same number of departments, but more power had shifted to the Mayor and
other positions had been flipped around. Generally speaking, there were two main complaints about Unigov, which were much the same as complaints about government consolidation in general. First, the services did not really improve while their taxes remained at the same high level. In Marion County, there were still fifty to sixty entities capable of levying taxes and they had simply switched around departments and positions without really eliminating any of these layers. In this way, people are still getting the same services, paying the same price for it, but it was coming from a different department. If anything, the layers just became more confusing because people did not fully understand the technical changes that had taken place and so to them, it was just someone different doing the same job. Second, there is a general complaint that Unigov simply did not go far enough. Arrangements for services remains the same as before but are now financed by a special service district as opposed to a specific government department. There was limited actual consolidation of services and the financial benefits to the city are minimal at best.

In conclusion, despite the fact that the ultimate success of Unigov is debatable, it still offered an important revival to the city of Indianapolis and it introduced the idea of government consolidation to its people. It created a new system of government in the area and forever altered the way that services are provided to its constituents. As people continued to get used to this new government, there were nearly thirty years of quiet on the government reform front. After Unigov, it seemed to disappear from the legislative agendas. There were smaller bills that were enacted in order to improve certain parts of Unigov or enhance its implementation, but there was no more talk of an overhaul in government. Then, nearly thirty years later, the city government in Indianapolis was again faced with an opportunity to further
consolidate services in the city and to close some of the loopholes that Unigov had left behind. 

Mayor Bart Peterson grew up during the implementation phases of Unigov and had seen the benefits and pitfalls of this particular system; he felt that he had the right ideas to bring Indianapolis even closer to its goal of a fully efficient, consolidated city-county government.
Indianapolis Works!

In 2004, Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson, created an idea that would serve to clear up some of the discrepancies found in Unigov and further consolidate Marion County. He came up with a plan called Indy Works that he thought would continue to save the city millions of dollars. When creating Indy Works, Mayor Peterson focused mainly on the ways that Unigov had not fully consolidated and aimed to include some of the omissions discussed earlier.

There were five major provisions to the original Indy Works plan and most of them are the specific exclusions of Unigov\textsuperscript{35}. First, Mayor Peterson wanted to merge the Indianapolis Police Force with the Marion County Sheriff Department into one metropolitan police force. He wanted to build one unified, county-wide law enforcement agency under the direction of the county sheriff. The jurisdiction of this new entity would be all of Marion County, with the exception of the “excluded cities and towns” who may opt to join but would not be required. The sheriff would primarily be responsible for the Metropolitan Area Law Enforcement Agency which would have some different responsibilities from the Marion County Sheriff Department. In this plan, the Sheriff’s Department would only retain control of jail operation and emergency communication but everything else would now belong to this Metropolitan Law Enforcement Agency. There would still be a chief, but he would have greatly reduced power. In order to assist in all of these changes, the Mayor proposed a transition team that would oversee the functional and personnel changes. All of these adjustments to the metropolitan police force were estimated to save over $8 million annually\textsuperscript{36}. 
The next major provision of Indy Works was to merge the nine township fire departments into the Indianapolis Fire Department. This consolidation was expected to diminish duplication of services, improve efficiencies and eliminate a level of taxing authority. Each township would be known as an “operating district” so that people would feel that they are still getting personalized service. With this consolidation, Mayor Peterson also wanted to create a single, fire-based ambulance service that would be another division of the Indianapolis Fire Department. All of the fire consolidation efforts were estimated to save the city $21 million and simplify local property taxing units.37

Third, the position of township trustee would be eliminated throughout Marion County. Township trustees are responsible for providing financial assistance, or poor relief, to all eligible residents for a variety of daily expenses. In addition to providing poor relief, township trustees oversee fire operations within the city. But under Indy Works, fire operations would be under the jurisdiction of the Indianapolis Fire Department, so it no longer made sense to elect nine separate officials to simply take care of poor relief and other menial tasks. Taking this even further, Center Township is considered to be over 43% “low income” and yet responsible for dispensing over two-thirds of all money spent on poor relief in Marion County.38 It made no sense to elect nine separate officials, when the majority of money is spent in one place, and that would now be their sole responsibility. In order to combat all of this, Mayor Peterson suggested that the nine township trustees be replaced by two elected officials to distribute poor relief; one for the central district in the city and one for the surrounding townships. Also, instead of having nine township boards, there would be two district boards, one for each of the new poor relief districts. Once all of these changes have occurred, Mayor Peterson estimated
that it would save the city nearly $660,000 annually through the reduction of these salaries\textsuperscript{39}. In addition to poor relief, the remaining responsibilities of the trustee would be shifted to the appropriate city or county department and this alone was anticipated to save the city over $2.8 million annually by eliminating much of the overhead costs that were associated with these duties\textsuperscript{40}.

The fourth major part of Indy Works was to eliminate the office of township assessor in Marion County and move all assessment duties to the Marion County Assessor. In this way, Mayor Peterson was hoping to reduce the number of employees, cut costs and promote greater uniformity for property tax assessing. There would be various offices located around the county so that people would still feel that they can contact the assessing office but in the end, it would all be done by one person. According to Mayor Peterson’s original proposal, at the township level, there were over 180 people employed and they spend over $10.7 million annually\textsuperscript{41}. All of that money could now be channeled to the county in order to provide a uniform level of service. On a more practical level, having one person handling all of the assessing duties would be a much more certain way of achieving standard assessing values, rather than having nine separate people trying to interpret the same code.

The final aspect of this government consolidation plan was to do some “house cleaning” throughout both bureaucracies to get rid of, merge and add certain offices. In order to promote maximum efficiency, the Mayor’s office would have greater power in terms of budget oversight and the City Controller was to be expanded to the Office of Finance and Management. The Controller would now assume budget control of the executive and
legislative branches and the county Auditor would be in charge of the budget for the judicial branch. One final aspect of the Indy Works proposal was to continue to elect small claims judges on the township level, but move the courts to a division of the Marion County Superior Courts for all administrative and budgetary purposes. By doing this, administrative efficiencies alone were estimated to save about $525,000 annually for Indianapolis.

In theory, these all sounded like great ideas and Mayor Peterson wanted them to be introduced in the 2005 legislative session where the plan was ultimately sent to a summer study committee. This committee, called the Marion County Consolidation Study Commission had some interesting revelations and it turned out that the Indy Works idea could not fully deliver on all of its promises. The Indiana Policy Review Foundation reviewed academic research on government consolidation and the Commission also focused on the financial findings of a study by Reedy and Peters. Between these two studies, there were 28 factual differences found between the Mayor’s proposed plan and the actual facts of consolidating Marion County. Upon studying the Mayor’s plan, the Commission found that the Mayor was right about only one of the provisions. Indeed, the fire departments in Marion County did need to be consolidated, but at that point in time, the consolidation should be mainly functional and less structural. The fire departments should work as a more cohesive unit, but the Commission was still unsure if it made the most financial sense to structurally operate under the Indianapolis Fire Department.

Other than fire, the Commission found that it could not support the idea of Indy Works and they produced a report that fully and thoroughly outlined their concerns. The report was
published by the Indiana Legislative Services Agency in November 2005 and was an accurate
description of the meetings of the Commission. To begin with the police merger, the main
reason that the Commission could not support this was because of the dire lack of public
support for the motion. There were various stake holders that were not on board and there
was an alarming amount of public opposition to such a measure. The report found only
$2,000,000 in savings where the Mayor has promised upwards of $9,000,000. Even this $2
million could be achieved through smarter and better purchasing decisions and full functional
consolidation was not necessary. The Commission recommended to the Mayor that he create a
truly bipartisan panel of all involved parties, including the public, to research better methods
for functional consolidation between the two departments without creating such major tax
shifts.

Next, the Commission did support some functional fire consolidation, but the
Commission found various factual details that did not support structurally combining all the
districts. First, the estimated savings given by the Mayor were way off the mark. Mayor
Peterson said that it would save the city $21 million and the actual report could only find $3
million and, as was the case with the police merger, was found mainly through simple
purchasing decisions. Instead of structural consolidation, the Commission recommended a
Fire Training and Education Advisory Board to come to better conclusions about personnel,
special operation teams, purchasing, and health insurance to offer alternatives to the status
quo of the fire departments. This board was to study ways that the various departments could
work together more efficiently to provide better services to their respective residents.
Third, in terms of poor relief and the township trustees, the Commission Report found that the positions of trustee and township board are actually important to the morale of the township. They provide the budget for the trustee and small claims courts and they oversee the fire departments and township assistance. Since the fire departments would not be structurally consolidated at this time, the trustee position is still valuable. Also, a large part of their job description is to investigate who needs the most assistance and who does not so that tax dollars are used efficiently. Although the Commission does not find total elimination to be the best course of action, they did recognize the need for some consolidation. Functions like cemeteries, fence disputes, animal kills, etc could be moved to the appropriate county department to alleviate that pressure on the township budget.

Then, in terms of a township assessor, the Commission felt that this position was too valuable to totally eliminate, but there were some changes that could be made. The main problem that the Commission had with the assessing provisions was that the numbers and assumptions in the Mayor’s proposal were not accurate and the descriptions of their jobs were also not factual. After making up for the numeric discrepancies and finding out the facts, the Commission found that township assessors are more familiar with their jurisdictions and are able to work much more efficiently because of this fact. This familiarity would be lost if all assessing duties fell under one county assessor. They feel that this person would be unable to be fully familiar with each district and, despite the technical merging under one assessor, there would still be numerous people performing the assessing duties and reporting back to the county assessor. At least with township assessors, these people are certified and have experience in the field.
The next provision was the consolidation of the offices of City Controller with the county Auditor which was projected by the Mayor to save $900,000\textsuperscript{48}. The report found that it would actually not save taxpayers any money to put these offices together, and that this particular merger would show an annual increase of $54,000 - $250,000 to taxpayers\textsuperscript{49}. Needless to say, because of this fact, the Commission did not support this consolidation. Finally, in terms of the small claims courts provision, the Commission found that these courts are necessary and vital to the efficiency of the overall court system and that their contributions in terms of court costs is vital to the overall revenue of the Marion County Courts.

So despite the fact that the committee did not find the original Indy Works proposal to be very effective, they did offer ways to improve it and acknowledged that there is room for further consolidation in Marion County. Even though this specific plan did not come to fruition, it did accomplish one major goal and that was to reintroduce the people of Indianapolis to the idea that their government can and should be less confusing and more efficient. Not since the inception of Unigov over thirty years prior had people really considered any sweeping government reform movement. Indy Works, although originally unsuccessful, got the ball rolling on Marion County government consolidation in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.
Recent Consolidation Legislation

Each year since the introduction of Indy Works there has been some legislation that deals with Marion County consolidation. In 2006, the year following the Marion County Consolidation Study Commission Report was published, there were four bills introduced that addressed consolidation and they each focused on various parts of the original Indy Works idea. Senate Bill 001 was all about fire consolidation. It consolidated all the township fire departments with the airport authority and some fire protection territories. The Mayor of Indianapolis would appoint a transition team to help with the process. This new fire territory would have a metropolitan Board of Commissioners to prepare the transition plan, approve equipment purchases over $50,000, oversee asset reallocations, nominate candidates for fire chief and advise this person on the operation of the department. The Chief would also perform various other tasks within the department. Additionally, Senate Bill 001 laid out the logistics of various tax matters associated with the property tax issues of funding the department. Although these were good ideas, the Conference Committee Report was never signed and so the bill died in the final stages of the process.

Also during the 2006 legislative session, Senate Bill 394 was introduced by Senator Breaux but it did not even get a hearing in the Committee on Governmental Affairs and Interstate Cooperation. It was more of an all-inclusive bill and tried to incorporate more than just fire consolidation. There were provisions in this bill that dealt with eliminating the township small claims courts and adding them as a part of the Superior Court. It also included some fire consolidation language but focused more on pension benefits for firefighters and less
on consolidating the departments. As already stated, the bill was not met with much support and was unable to get a hearing in committee. This is probably due to the fact that the Marion County Consolidation Study Commission had just met and determined the value of these very offices and courts. Much of what was contained in Senate Bill 394 was also in Indy Works and the Commission just stated that it was not necessary to structurally combine all of these offices and that it would not actually save money to consolidate them.

A third bill dealing with consolidation in 2006 was Senate Bill 170 also authored by Senator Breaux and it fell to much the same fate as Senate Bill 394 not even obtaining a hearing in committee. Senate Bill 170 dealt with eliminating township assessors and transferring those duties to the county assessor. It also had a provision that if a township consolidated within a city, then the city would absorb that township debt. This provision was meant to act as an incentive to the townships, but it did not come to be. Basically, this bill dealt with the various logistical details of combining the townships into Indianapolis-Marion County.

Finally, Senator Lutz authored Senate Bill 238 that was also strictly dealing with fire consolidation and was very much the same idea as Senate Bill 001 in that it combined the township departments but also combined emergency ambulance responsibilities so that the city was now in charge of that as well. This bill was referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs and Interstate Cooperation, but it never passed out of Committee. Clearly, from all of the bills that were introduced in this session, fire consolidation was on the minds of the legislators and it was an idea that would continue to come up for debate in numerous study sessions. It was something that clearly needed to happen, but the parties
involved could not seem to agree on a particular plan of action in order to make the transition as smooth and efficient as possible.

In 2007, there was really only one bill introduced dealing with consolidation. Because it was a budget year, there were other issues that took priority over government consolidation, but it was still mentioned in order to make people keep thinking about it. House Bill 1568 was authored by Representative William Crawford and it managed to make it all the way to conference committee but the report was never signed by all the necessary people. House Bill 1568 consolidated the fire departments and the departments of the “excluded towns and cities” could join if they wanted to but it would not be a requirement. Also, all fire-related tax levies would move from a localized township tax base to a more broad county-wide tax base. This bill also addressed township assessors but instead of immediately terminating their position, the office of township assessor would no longer be on the ballot in 2010. Aside from this bill, there was not really any legislation introduced in 2007 that mentioned Marion County consolidation.

Since Indy Works was introduced, there have been continuing conversations about government consolidation in Marion County. It has been something that has been on the General Assembly back burner until the session of 2008 when Senator James Merritt decided to bring it to the forefront once again. He introduced a big government consolidation package that would hopefully shed new light on some issues and continue to perpetuate the ideas of other legislators from the past few years. 2008 was bound to be a monumental session because Indiana was in the middle of a property tax crisis. Citizens were outraged by their
dramatically different property taxes and were bewildered about how the assessed values of their homes could be so different over the course of a year. There were people whose property taxes went down and there were people who paid more than a 100% increase. They were outraged and it was clear that the General Assembly was going to have one thing on their minds throughout the session: permanent and immediate property tax relief for homeowners. Senator Merritt took an interesting approach to the issue by looking at the root cause of increased property taxes: property taxes fund local government. If there are too many people working in local government and too many unnecessary budgets to be replenished, naturally there is taxpayer money that is being wasted. In Senator Merritt’s mind, one way to combat these outrageous property taxes was to drastically reduce local government and consolidate services. If there are less government entities, there is less money needed to fund them. Less money needed results in less tax levies on homeowners. All of these issues are connected and it was Senator Merritt’s mission to deliver property tax relief to his constituents by effectively consolidating services in Marion County. This plan was Senate Bill 280 and it had a number of provisions and even smaller bills tied to it that promised big changes for Marion County. Some of the ideas have been tried before, but Senator Merritt was hoping that by putting it out to the public as a package that promised real changes, he would gather more public support for the bill, an area that always seemed to be lacking in other consolidation bills.

Senator Merritt put his consolidation package together and divided it by the various service areas. The first was public safety dealing with fire and emergency service. Consolidation would no longer be an option, but rather a requirement. The townships, fire territories and the airport authority would all be one fire department in the Indianapolis Fire
Department. In terms of emergency response systems, the Mayor of Indianapolis would appoint a Professional Standards Board that would be in charge of making sure that Indiana's emergency response procedures are in line with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Department of Homeland Security.56 In terms of EMS services, the total number of government-supported EMS providers would be reduced from ten to three. There would be one lead sponsoring hospital and one lead fire department for the Indianapolis-Marion County region. When there is one main hospital and one main fire department, everything is more streamlined and it reduces communication errors and improves the quality of service that people receive.

Additionally, there were various provisions in the package that dealt with eliminating township government. In his plan, the Mayor and City-County Council would have the power to abolish the offices of trustee and township board and give those responsibilities to the appropriate county offices. It also eliminated the township small claims courts and added judges to the Marion County Superior Court. With this, his plan would reduce the number of judges from nine part-time judges to four full-time judges and the governor would appoint these judges for a term ending in 2014 at which point they would be voted on in the General Election.57 Also, keeping with the streamlining idea, the Merritt plan eliminated the office of township constable and created a warrant officer in the small claims division of the Superior Court. This warrant officer would have the training and credentials of a law enforcement officer and would be a combination of a Bailiff and Constable.58 And, as in all government reform proposals since the Indy Works idea, the position of township assessor would be eliminated and those duties would now belong to the Marion County Assessor. The third policy
area encompassed by this package deals with the shape of the city-county government. In this, the Mayor would be responsible for the law enforcement agency. The Sheriff and his department would only be in charge of jail operations, emergency communication, security for certain buildings and property and sex and violent offender registration. Also in this area is a provision that would allow the City-County Council to abolish included towns, the Ben Davis Conservancy District or the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Whichever entity is abolished would now be the responsibility of the consolidated city. All of these measures were drafted into Senate Bill 280. Aside from Senate Bill 280, but still part of consolidating government was Senate Bill 260 which would effectively combine the offices of Marion County Treasurer, Auditor and the Indianapolis Controller. There were also two separate Senate Resolutions that he proposed which would help further the reform movement. Senate Joint Resolution 4 would abolish the office of County Coroner and replace that office with a medical examiner to more accurately investigate deaths. The final aspect of the package was Senate Joint Resolution 17 that would de-constitutionalize county offices. Currently, all county officials are elected and written into the Constitution so they cannot be abolished or changed with a simple bill, the whole Constitution must be amended. SJR 17 would make it so that is not the case and some of these positions could be eliminated.

Senator Merritt introduced all of this legislation at the start of the 2008 legislative session, but as the weeks went on the smaller bills died and his Senate Bill 280 went on quite the journey as it attempted to make its way through the process. Senate Bill 260 was referred to the Committee on Local Government and Elections, but it never actually received a hearing and was therefore dead. SJR 4 and 17 were met with much the same fate as they also failed to
get a hearing in the same committee. So, already what had started as a package with the potential for big change was already reduced to one bill. Senate Bill 280 was also assigned to the Committee on Local Government and Elections and its first committee hearing was expected to draw so much public discussion that they had the committee meeting in the Chamber. At the meeting, there were many parts that were changed immediately. First, Senator Merritt had an amendment to offer going into committee that would make some important technical corrections so that the bill was consistent with the pre-existing language in the Indiana Code. Aside from the technical changes, this committee amendment removed the language requiring the airport authority fire department to consolidate and it removed the language that would have merged the Public Library with the city. Finally, it removed the provision that made the sheriff’s department responsible for emergency communication in the city. Also in committee, Senator Mike Young proposed an amendment that removed the “excluded cities and towns” from being forced to consolidate their fire departments. They wanted to remain autonomous and did not want to be included in any consolidation efforts in the city. Going further, Senator Merritt amended out the language that eliminated the township assessors. Senator Lawson had an entire bill devoted to the logistics of township assessors and so, in order to more effectively focus on other areas, Senator Merritt removed his assessing language.

The bill passed through to second readings where it was headed for even more drastic changes. During second readings, there were two more amendments added. The first amendment removed the language about included towns and the Ben Davis Conservancy District so these districts would remain intact if the bill passed. But Senator Merritt was still
receiving negative input from people so he made one final amendment in hopes that he could still save the bill. The final amendment basically stripped Senate Bill 280 of all language except for the fire consolidation and EMS services\(^64\). After all of these changes were made, the watered down version of the bill passed out of the Senate and was sent over to the House of Representatives, as amended. In the House, it sat for a few days before being assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee. Senator Merritt originally thought that this would be great because what was left of Senate Bill 280 was almost identical to a bill that Representative Crawford had authored the previous session. Representative Crawford was the Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and had authored House Bill 1568 in 2007 which was the fire consolidation bill previously discussed. But, in such a tense session, there was some political scuffling and Representative Crawford decided that he was not going to hear the bill. He felt that people were trying to play politics with the bill in order to strategically eliminate certain people and positions and for this reason, he pulled Senate Bill 280 from the committee schedule\(^65\). Under normal circumstances when this happens, the bill would effectively be dead, but Senator Merritt decided that would not be the case. With House Bills in the Senate still on second reading, Senator Merritt was able to find a germane bill to which he could add the remaining Senate Bill 280 language. Since the language had passed one house, it was still alive for the remainder of the process and could be amended into another bill. House Bill 1105 dealt with various public safety matters and had a particular provision dealing with firefighter pensions\(^66\). They were able to put the fire consolidation language into this part as a second reading amendment. Throughout second reading there was some debate on the amendment but it was similar to the debate that had been had when all of Senate Bill 280 was on third
reading in the Senate and the bill was able to maintain enough support to pass through to third readings and continue on out of the Senate. When House Bill 1105 returned amended to the House, Representative Tincher expectedly dissented on the changes and sent the bill to conference committee. There was one conference committee report prepared that contained the fire consolidation language, but Representative Tincher would not sign this version. Instead, a new report was prepared excluding the language and that was the version that got signed by all of the necessary people and eventually passed into law.

So, what started as a sweeping reform package for government consolidation was eventually dead. The 2008 session came and went as all the others have without any significant reform in Marion County government.

In conclusion, government consolidation is an idea that has been evolving in Indiana since the 1960s. From Unigov, through Indianapolis Works to Senator Merritt’s most recent government reform package, the ideas of consolidation continue to present themselves year after year in the Indiana General Assembly. It is truly a matter of time before these recurring themes are made into reality. This evolution has been the product of years of study by countless influential legislators and constituents alike and it will no doubt continue to change in the years to come. Because of this continuous effort in Indiana, it has become the model off which other cities and counties mirror their own consolidation efforts. It will be interesting in the upcoming legislative sessions to see which pieces of consolidation continue to be active and which fall by the wayside. Regardless of the details, it is clear that consolidation is one policy
area that will only grow in the future and will continue to gather public support as people truly
become more aware of its benefits.

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