

A Public Hearing by the Iron County Board of Commissioners was called to order by its Chairman Carl Lind on Wednesday, June 26, 2013, at 1:08 p.m. The Hearing was held in the Commissioners' Room of the Courthouse. The purpose of the hearing was to receive comments about the proposed consolidation of the County Clerk's and Register of Deeds' offices. The Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag was recited. County Clerk Joan Luhtanen called the Roll of Officers. Present were: Tim Aho, Jim Brennan, Ray Coates, and Lind. Absent was Patti Peretto. Coates made a motion, seconded by Brennan, to approve the agenda. On Voice Vote, the motion carried.

County Clerk Joan Luhtanen stated that she is a working clerk and Joetta Greig is a working Register of Deeds. In other counties where there is a consolidated office, the primary role is one of County Clerk, and perform only supervisory duties in the Register of Deeds' office.

She cautioned that consolidation may result in a shift of who gets paid the wages, but advised against taking the savings on the one hand, without being mindful of where the savings will go. Technology advances don't do the work. The work load is not diminishing, it is only changing. She gave examples of how responsibilities in Elections alone have shifted to the county and local clerks, without support from the State. Wide ranging changes in the court, throughout the State, are anticipated in the next three to five years, which will also impact the local operations.

Luhtanen stated that the physical offices are now in separate buildings. Other counties have the offices in one place, or across the hall, or some other close proximity. This enables the personnel to be available to the public to handle all the procedures.

Luhtanen asked the board to expand their planning process to include the entire courthouse operations, seek input from department heads and employees, use whatever savings that result wisely, before determining the configuration of offices that will best serve the needs of the people of Iron County.

Register of Deeds Joetta Greig stated that by law the deputy Register of Deeds cannot go to some meetings and do everything that the Register can. She questioned why the board was considering the consolidation issue now, since a future county board could easily reverse the decision before it could take effect the beginning of 2017.

Civil Counsel Steve Tinti stated the necessary procedure. The process requires one public hearing, then making a decision on the issue between ten and 30 days following the hearing. It also requires a super majority of the county board's approval; in this case, four out of the five members must be in favor of the consolidation. It must be on the agenda of a regular meeting, or a special meeting must be held. The consolidation would not begin to take effect until the 2016 election cycle, when the combined position would appear on the ballot.

Administrator Sue Clisch noted that Iron County's population has been declining. The 2010 Census showed that we have 11,817 persons. Eight U.P. counties already have combined offices, some for many years, and they have been running successfully.

Commissioner Brennan said to think ahead to 2020 with the trend toward Iron County still losing population. He saw no harm in making a decision this year. If the consolidation is passed now, everyone will know. He could see potential gain in the future.

Chairman Lind said the biggest expense is people. With technology coming forth, we are going to see less human beings and more computers operating. He hoped for an orderly reorganization, with no employees being laid off. This reorganization can be accomplished through natural attrition.

Deputy Register of Deeds Cindy Richter was concerned about less human interaction in the future. Will we lose the component of helping people?

With no further discussion, Aho made a motion, seconded by Brennan, to adjourn. On Voice Vote, the motion carried. The time was 1:40 p.m.