

Larry Suffredin

Cook County Commissioner
(13th District)

Transition Team Final Report

2003/2004

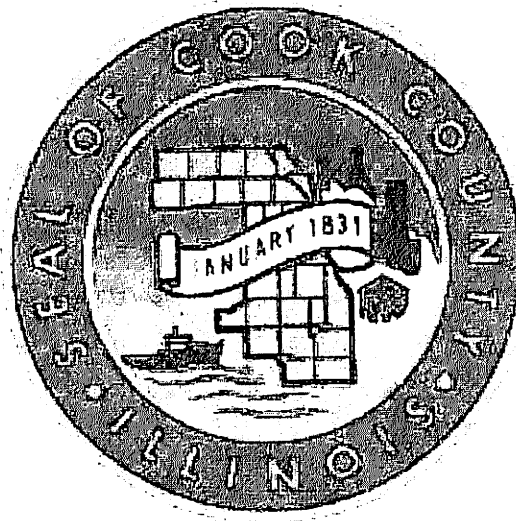


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Mission and Background

Commissioner Larry Suffredin was sworn in as Cook County Commissioner for the 13th District in December 2002.

Upon taking the oath of office, Commissioner Suffredin formed a Transition Team, comprised of key leaders in the district to review and prioritize the many issues facing Cook County government.

The Transition Team was established to utilize and broaden the citizen's knowledge and ability to help bring reform to the Cook County Board and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and meet the pressing needs of the community. It provides a forum for community leaders and local experts to set priorities and assist in bringing reform to Cook County government.

The Transition Team was chaired by Christopher G. Kennedy of Kenilworth. Evanston Mayor Lorraine Morton, Glencoe Mayor Anthony Ruzicka, Skokie Mayor George VanDusen and 50th Ward Alderman Bernard Stone served as co-chairs.

At the same time, Commissioner Suffredin formed four Task Forces to focus on specific areas of Cook County government – Community Health, Court Reform, Forest Preserves and Tax & Revenue Reform. The task forces were chaired by Catherine Counard (Community Health), Pradeep Roy-Singh (Court Reform), Jane Balaban (Forest Preserves) and Alderman Ann Rainey (Tax & Revenue Reform). The task force chairs served as policy advisors on the Transition Team.

The Transition Team began its efforts in January 2003, and held meetings in March and June. The committee then divided into working groups that met with targeted constituencies. This report summarizes the work done to date by the Transition Team and outlines key priorities for Commissioner Suffredin to work on during his term.

Transition Team Members

Chair

- Christopher G. Kennedy

Co-chairs

- Hon. Lorraine Morton (Mayor, City of Evanston)
- Hon. George Van Dusen (Mayor, Village of Skokie)
- Hon. Anthony J. Ruzicka, Jr. (President, Village of Glencoe)
- Hon. Bernard L. Stone (Alderman, 50th Ward - Chicago)

Members

- Jane Balaban (Forest Preserve Task Force Chair)
- Dr. Catherine Counard (Community Health Task Force Chair)
- Judith Ross (Staff Director)
- Hon. Ann Rainey (Tax & Revenue Reform Task Force Chair)
- Pradeep Roy-Singh, Esq. (Court Reform Task Force Chair)
- Lali Watt (Tax & Revenue Reform Task Force)
- Richard J. Witry, Esq. (General Counsel)

Working Group Reports

Based on discussions at the Transition Team meetings, the team was divided into five working groups. Each group was responsible for further investigating a key area of County government where reforms are needed.

The five working groups are as follows:

1. Administration
2. Budget
3. Forest Preserves
4. Health Care
5. Outreach & Communications

Administration Working Group

Facilitator: Hon. George Van Dusen

The Administration Working Group was responsible for looking at Cook County's interactions with local governments. They aimed to determine strategies to improve the relations and coordination with these entities.

Through a series of discussions, the following were identified as administrative issues for the group to investigate:

- Create a system to codify Cook County ordinances.
- Pass a stronger, more detailed ethics ordinance, prohibiting self-dealing on County issues.
- Review the County organizational structure and job descriptions to improve operational efficiency and management controls.
- Seek grants and outside funding to pay for needed programs.
- Invest in technology to more efficiently service County residents – including online access to data and records.
- Make contract approval and bill paying process more efficient.
- Improve County roads and public safety.

The Administrative Working Group interviewed key contacts in municipalities throughout the district in order to get their input on relations with County government. As a result of these interviews, the following four key actions/priorities were identified:

- 1) Convene a meeting to discuss improving technology among County departments.
- 2) Convene a meeting to discuss use of the Skokie Courthouse. A plan is needed to improve the relationship between Department of Central Planning and the Chief Judge's Office.

- 3) Meet with the District's highway engineers to discuss ways of improving County highways within the District.
- 4) Explore ways to provide customer relations training for the County workforce and professionalize the staff.

Budget Working Group

Facilitators: Hon. Anthony Ruzicka & Lali Watt

Cook County government manages a budget of nearly \$3 billion – when adding together the budgets of Cook County and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. This budget is larger than 35 states and has grown steadily each year while needed services are still lacking in many areas. Improving the financial health of Cook County is one of Commissioner Suffredin's top priorities.

The Cook County Board passed its 2003 budget in November 2002, just prior to the start date of the newly elected commissioners. Receiving information about the budget from the Cook County board is difficult at best. Only summary information is available on the website, and it is posted nearly a year after the budget has been approved.

During the 2004 budget process, Commissioner Suffredin has been an outspoken critic of the process and has proposed amendments to prevent the increasing of taxes and imposition of new taxes.

The Budget Working Group will closely review and analyze the 2004 Cook County budget. The goals are to:

- Obtain detailed and accurate information about what is included in the budget.
- Identify budget items individually to accurately determine the costs and revenues related to each department.
- Reallocate money in the budget to make it more accurately reflect the County's needs.
- Identify areas of the budget where waste exists and identify strategies to eliminate waste.

Health Care Working Group

Facilitator: Dr. Catherine Counard

The Health Care Working Group worked in conjunction with Commissioner Suffredin's Community Health Task Force. The primary goal of the group was to expand Cook County health care services to constituents of the 13th District. Dedicated volunteers with various health backgrounds were brought together to discuss and prioritize the issues.

As a result of discussions, the group identified several key focus areas:

- Develop a primary health clinic in the 13th District.
- Increase education and improve policies to reduce the spread of mosquito borne illnesses.
- Increase the level of comprehensive health care, specifically primary and preventative care for the uninsured and underinsured.
- Provide education about environmental health care, specifically lead poisoning in children.
- Improve the health care and education provided for senior citizens.
- Improve the level of mental health services.

Accomplishments

The following is a summary of the work done by Commissioner Suffredin's team focused on health care reform:

Mosquito Borne Illnesses

Phase I of a public education campaign to prevent the spread of West Nile Virus began on May 5, 2003 with a Community Forum. The Forum focused on improving coordination efforts among all the municipalities in the District, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mosquito Abatement districts and the Cook County and Illinois Departments of Public Health.

The community forum was co-sponsored by Commissioner Larry Suffredin, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, State Senator Jeff Schoenberg and State Representative Julie Hamos. The event increased public awareness of West Nile Virus and receive significant publicity.

Phase II was a public education information campaign in the fall and summer 2003. The campaign provided West Nile Virus prevention tips for constituents within the 13th District and Cook County.

Phase III was a public awareness campaign focused on standing water in cemeteries. Working in partnership with Comptroller Hynes, a cemetery outreach plan was unveiled in mid-June. Public awareness materials were distributed at cemeteries across the district and state. Training was offered by the Cook County Department of Public Health to all cemetery personnel in Cook County.

Comprehensive Health Care

A goal was set to improve medical/pharmaceutical service delivery to 13th District constituents.

Environmental Health

A presentation on homeland security protocols was made to the Community Health Task Force in May 2003 by Dr. Counard and Mr. Lowell Huckleberry of the Skokie Department of Public Health.

The next public awareness campaign will educate the public on lead abatement.

Clean Indoor Air Ordinances

The task force took a public stand on the dangers of second hand smoke and encouraged local municipalities in the district including Wilmette to strengthen their clean indoor air ordinances.

Communications

Improved communications between the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) and the district's residents, municipalities and local health departments was identified as a key goal.

At the request of Commissioner Suffredin, Dr. Martin, Cook County Department of Public Health Director, made time to meet with key representatives from the Evanston Department of Public Health, Skokie Department of Public Health, the Oak Park Health Department and the Stickney Township Health Department. It is anticipated that these renewed relationships will help foster improved communications among these agencies in the future.

Forest Preserve Working Group

Facilitator: Jane Balaban

The Forest Preserve Working Group coordinated with Commissioner Suffredin's Forest Preserve Task Force to identify priority areas to target for reform efforts.

Commissioner Suffredin and Jane Balaban met with key environmental and forest preserve advocates to discuss strategies for addressing the many reforms needed in the Forest Preserve District. The participants identified "strengthening land management practices to better maintain existing land" as their top priority. Other identified priorities include:

Priority Areas:

- Review and update the District's Land Management Guidelines in order to more effectively manage the existing natural lands. The guidelines can be used to measure the District's accomplishments and hold it accountable for implementing sound management practices.
- Develop programs and strengthen current efforts to encourage volunteers to participate in restoration activities in the Forest Preserves. Work with the District's Development Director to secure additional funding to support volunteer programs.
- Broaden education and outreach programs; develop and install educational signage throughout all the Forest Preserves.

Actions Needed:

- Introduce a resolution for the Forest Preserve to adopt new management guidelines.
- Following the introduction of the resolution and its referral to committee, a public hearing should be held to get expert testimony on best practices in land management.
- Introduce a resolution to reactivate the President's Community Advisory Council. The District should consult the Council on land management practices and restoration efforts.

Note: In November 2003, the District introduced updated and revised land management guidelines and the document was approved by the Board. In

general, the Forest Preserve Task Force members were supportive of the updated guidelines.

The revised guidelines approved in November 2003 included a provision reactivating the Council.

Long Term Priority Areas:

- Better utilize the regional advocacy groups with relevant expertise to strengthen land management and restoration efforts.
- Disband or radically reform the Forest Preserve District Police Force.
- Form a Conservation Officer Corps.
- Inventory the natural resources owned by the FPDCC.
- Purchase the 7,000 acres of land held in trust for the FPDCC.
- All job positions within the District need to have new job descriptions that clearly and accurately identify job responsibilities and qualifications. The new job descriptions can be used as a tool to better manage staffing levels to maximize land management activities.
- Identify storm water/watershed planning issues.
- Adopt FPD policy on appropriate land use that addresses passive recreation, land management, etc.

Outreach & Communications Working Group

Facilitator: Richard J. Witry, Esq.

With a goal of reaching out to 1000 people in his first year in office, Commissioner Suffredin needs to increase his office's outreach to different constituencies. For this purpose, he hired a staff member to oversee his community outreach efforts.

Cook County manages the nation's largest integrated trial court system, owns 68,000 acres of forest preserve land, and is the nation's second largest public health system, providing a full continuum of public health services to the medically underserved.

The Outreach & Communications Working Group met with local community organization leaders to brainstorm ways to best communicate with them and inform them of Cook County events. The leaders were asked to suggest other groups and organizations that should be invited to join them. They were also encouraged to add the Commissioner's office to their communication distribution list for written and electronic newsletters, etc.

To continue to strengthen communication and outreach among Commissioner Suffredin, constituents, community groups, and business leaders, the following steps will be undertaken:

- Work to expand Commissioner Suffredin's database to include as many community groups, community leaders, and local businesses as possible.
- Develop ongoing communications with targeted constituencies to keep them informed about County related or sponsored services, events, and issues.
- Serve as a central point of contact for information on Cook County government – both in-person at the Commissioner's offices and through his website.
- Request that community groups include Commission Suffredin on their outreach lists (mailings, newsletters, e-mail updates) to help ensure he is informed of and updated on happenings in the community.
- Improve communication with media in the district in an effort to encourage local media to devote more time to covering County issues and the Commissioner's programs and messages.

- Increase communications with government officials – specifically village managers – to facilitate interaction between municipal government and Cook County government and increase awareness of issues.
- Work to improve the frequency with which the County consults and works with advocacy groups with specialized expertise.
- Provide information to constituents, community groups, local businesses, and local governments so that they better understand what County government does, how it affects their lives and how they can work with Cook County.
- Hold future meetings to bring together community leaders who are or should be involved with county government.
- Work with Cook County elected officials and administrators to develop training programs to improve the customer service training given to county employees. The goal is to improve the service provided by the County and its employees to residents.

General Summary of Recommendations

Administration

1. Create a system to codify Cook County ordinances.
2. Pass a strong ethics ordinance that prohibits self-dealing on County issues.
3. Review the County organizational structure and job descriptions to improve operational efficiency.
4. Seek grants and outside funding to pay for needed programs.
5. Invest in technology to more efficiently serve County residents – including providing online access to data and records.
6. Make contract approval and bill paying process more efficient.

Budget

1. Make financial accountability for the nearly \$3 billion Cook County annual budget a priority.
2. Engage local experts to recommend improvements in the budget process.
3. Help local governments by encouraging the County to improve and streamline its processes for collecting taxes and updating tax records and encouraging prompt payment of taxes to local governments.

Forest Preserves

1. Transfer Forest Preserve District policing power to local agencies and disband or radically reform the Forest Preserve District police force.
2. Inventory the natural resources owned by the Forest Preserve District.
3. Purchase the 7,000 acres of land held in trust for the Forest Preserve District.
4. Strengthen land management practices to better maintain existing land.
5. Develop programs to encourage greater volunteer participation in land management and restoration efforts.
6. Develop proper level of staffing and clarify job responsibilities and qualifications.
7. Consult more frequently with knowledgeable advocacy groups to solicit their input on land management practices and restoration efforts.

Health Care

1. Work with local health care providers to bring a Cook County public health clinic to the 13th District.
2. Make the delivery system of health care user friendly and less time intensive.
3. Develop a coordinated plan with public, private and non-profit groups to address public health issues.
4. Investigate a partnership to dispense County pharmaceuticals at local drugstores.
5. Bring more federal and state funds to the County to cover the cost of medical care for the uninsured and underinsured.

Outreach & Communications

1. Increase opportunities for constituent input on government action.
2. Include advocacy groups with specialized expertise in county discussions on issues.

3. Improve communication and coordination between County and local governments.
4. Provide customer service training for County employees.