

DRAFT MINUTES

**Commission on Local Government
Public Hearing
City of Covington – Alleghany Highlands
Proposed Consolidation Agreement**

**7:00 p.m., March 21, 2011
Moomaw Center
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
1000 Dabney Drive
Clifton Forge, Virginia**

Members Present

Wanda C. Wingo, Chairman
Cole Hendrix, Vice-Chairman
Harold H. Bannister
Kathleen K. Seefeldt

Members Absent

Staff Present

Susan Williams, Local Government Policy Manager
Zack Robbins, Senior Policy Analyst

I. Call to Order

Commission Chairman Wanda C. Wingo called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. on March 21, 2011, in the Moomaw Center at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge, Virginia.

II. Public Hearing on Consolidation Proposal

A. Introductory Remarks by the Chairman

Mrs. Wingo welcomed those in attendance and explained that the Commission scheduled this public hearing as part of its review of the proposed City of Covington – Alleghany County consolidation agreement negotiated by the Citizens Committees that were appointed by the Circuit Court to act for and in lieu of the Covington City Council and Alleghany County Board of Supervisors.

Mrs. Wingo stated that public notice for this meeting was published in the March 2 and March 9 editions of the *Virginian Review*, and that notice was also sent to the appropriate local government officials. She then introduced the members of the Commission and its staff.

Mrs. Wingo explained to those in attendance that the purpose of the meeting is to afford the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed agreement. She then described the legal authority for the Commission's review of the agreement and provided a brief history of other reviews that have been conducted by the Commission in the Allegheny Highlands area. Mrs. Wingo also summarized the activities that have occurred in connection with the current review to date, and described the Commission's planned tour and Oral Presentations that would occur the next day.

Finally, Mrs. Wingo stated that the Commission's record in this matter will remain open for the receipt of additional comment until April 5, 2011, and that the Commission will endeavor to issue its report prior to the end of May 2011. She then opened the floor to receive comments from the public.

B. Receipt of Testimony

Mr. Eston Burge of Covington asked, in the event that the proposed consolidation is not approved at referendum, if there is a time limitation before another consolidation proceeding can be initiated. He then asked, in the event that the proposed consolidation is approved at referendum, whether there is a mechanism in place to revert to the current local government structure.

Ms. Williams stated that she would research the issue after the meeting and respond to Mr. Burge's inquiries.

Mr. David Oliver of Allegheny County spoke in favor of the consolidation with reservation with regard to some of the provisions in the agreement, and stated that the past consolidation of Clifton Forge and Allegheny County Schools was successful.

Mr. Harrison Scott, resident of Covington, and former Mayor, stated that he was opposed to consolidation, citing concerns relative to police protection, postal identity, tax rates, maintenance of public facilities, and the continuation of urban-type services within the existing Covington city limits.

Mrs. Cynthia Friel spoke on behalf of her husband, Mr. Bruce Friel, both of Clifton Forge. Mr. Friel is in support of the consolidation, and his statements offered suggestions as to how the consolidation of law enforcement and education functions should be implemented.

Dr. Jim Ballou of Clifton Forge stated that he was in support of the proposed consolidation, mentioning anticipated cost savings and the need for cooperation between the city and county.

Dr. Michele Ballou of Clifton Forge spoke in favor of the proposed consolidation, citing concerns about the availability of jobs in the area and community sustainability.

Mr. Chip Snead, former Alleghany County Administrator, stated that he supports the consolidation proposal, pointing out that the process included significant negotiation between the members of the County and City Citizens Committees, and that the process was citizen-driven.

Mr. Leo Mulcahy of Alleghany County spoke in favor of consolidation, and stated that he believed it would benefit economic development in the area.

Mr. Bryan Thompson, a member of the Citizens Committee from Alleghany County, supported the proposal, and mentioned that the agreement was the product of compromise; no government employees' positions would be eliminated; the agreement reserves many decisions to provide flexibility to the future city council; and it utilizes state incentives to consolidate units of local government.

Mrs. Lisa Schoppmyer of Alleghany County stated that she is in support of the proposal and its compromises, and said that she believes consolidation would help with job growth in the area.

Mr. Mac Campbell said that the Citizens Committees have resolved most of his major concerns; however, he still believes that the county form of government is the most appropriate, that there are too many non-binding recommendations for the proposed city's council, and that Clifton Forge should not be divided between two council districts. Mr. Campbell is a former Clifton Forge council member, and served as chief negotiator for the Clifton Forge town reversion, and was also a member of Alleghany County Board of Supervisors during the County-City consolidation negotiations that occurred prior to the appointment of the Citizens Committees.

Mr. Don Lugar of Alleghany County spoke in favor of the consolidation, and stated that school identity should not be an issue.

Mr. Harry Casey, a member of the Covington Citizens Committee, stated that he was in support of the proposal, citing the anticipated cost effectiveness.

Mr. Randy Arno of Danville, a former Alleghany County Administrator, spoke in favor of the request and stated that, in the Alleghany Highlands area, there are too many local governments serving a small population. He cited the past successful consolidation of the Clifton Forge and Alleghany County schools, and said that the concerns about the inflexibility of the consolidation agreement are

unfounded. Mr. Arno also disclosed that he was an employee of the Weldon Cooper Center at UVA, and that he was speaking his personal views, and not representing the Center.

Mr. Art Mead of Tazewell County, an employee of the Weldon Cooper Center at UVA who served as staff to the Citizens Committees, reviewed the development of the agreement by the Committees, and expressed appreciation for their work.

There were no additional citizens to address the Commission.

C. Closing Statement

The Chairman and other Commission members then individually commended the Citizens Committees for their cooperation and thanked them for hosting the Commission. The Chairman also reminded those in attendance that the Commission will close its record April 5, 2011, and anticipates submission of its report before the end of May 2011.

III. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the public hearing was officially adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Wanda C. Wingo
Chairman

Susan B. Williams
Local Government Policy Manager