



Rock Island County  
1504 Third Avenue  
Rock Island, IL 61201  
(309) 558-3605

**Governance Task Force**  
**Tuesday November 16, 2015, 6:00 p.m.**  
**Focus Group**

The Governance Task Force of the Rock Island County Board held a focus group at the above date and time in the Conference Room of the Administration Office on the second floor of the County Building, 1504 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL.

**(Introductions have been removed for participant anonymity)**

**Nick Camlin (NC):** Well, I am Nick Camlin and I am heading up this Governance Task Force and also put together these focus groups. Me, Kai, and Moose are here to listen and hear your perceptions. We will interact with you ... not a whole lot. We will facilitate discussion, but if you get stuck on a question, you can't look to us for the answer. We really want to hear what is on your mind and what you have as perceptions of our County and our government. Oh, and we do have a time frame that we'll stick to and Kai is going to be flipping the slides when it's time for us to move on, so the first thing that we are going to ask you is, "What are some of the good things about this County as a whole?" and you can think about the activities, the location, the neighborhoods, etc. But what are some of the good things that you think of when you think of home?

**Participant 5:** Well, the setting on the river is a good thing. And the historic buildings and the history of the County.

**NC:** Why are those important elements to you?

**5:** That just makes it a more interesting place and very scenic. Beautiful places.

**Participant 1:** And we offer quite a bit, actually. We have two forest preserves. We have a zoo. You know. We have Hope Creek, which I know is questionable whether the ... the county anymore, but still it's something that's been provided for the people that need it. And I don't know, I think, as always, the Illinois side a bum rap because, you know, location and we can't really expand as much as a lot of the other ... the Iowa side and stuff, you know. But a lot of good things here.

**NC:** So I'm hearing both physical assets and also commitment assets that we have as a County. Any other things to add?

**Participant 6:** So just from a, I guess since I'm still purchasing property, right? And that's where I'm at in my state in life is ... so a lot of folks will ask me at work why don't I purchase on the Iowa side, it's so much better. Well, from my perspective financially, it makes a lot more sense for me to purchase on the Illinois side. So the taxes are a little bit different and where the Iowans don't pay as much in taxes, they get it in other areas ...

**NC:** You're talking property taxes?

**6:** Property taxes and things like that, so I've been fortunate enough to be able to purchase on the low end homes, you know, and fix them up because that's what I want to do. And then the taxes themselves will reflect that cost, so they'll adjust. So I've been working with the County and the township assessors and things like that and the taxes will end up getting lower because at the time when I purchased the houses, none of them were occupied. But then we have that homestead exemption, which I think is awesome and when I talk to people about oh should they rent or buy – you're better off buying. I mean, you're gonna get that exemption and it's not just for a certain age bracket; it's for any age bracket. I think that's one of the nice things we actually have here in the County and in the state of Illinois, also, that you get that kind of homestead exemption and then your taxes get lowered, so your overall mortgage payment goes down, too.

**NC:** So, this is interesting because that's a lot of what we hear a lot is taxes are so much higher over here. Do you guys ... have you heard that perception? Do you believe it? Do you agree with that perception? Okay.

**Participant 3:** When I was looking for a house, there seemed to be no rhyme or reason to taxing.

**NC:** Property taxing?

**3:** Property taxes, yeah.

**NC:** Are these plus ...

**6:** For me, for me it was a plus. The houses I've been able to buy, the pricing point is lower than if I would try to purchase a similar home in, say, Davenport. So I was able to buy a less expensive

home here and still be in what I consider to be a good neighborhood where I don't, you know, fear walking around at night, whereas a similar-priced home in Davenport would get me in a questionable neighborhood where I wouldn't feel comfortable, you know, going home at dark. So ...

**NC:** Okay. Interesting

**Participant 7:** I think another positive ... when we're recruiting folks or potential employees, I talk a lot about that we have many big town amenities but still the small town feel. And that's very appealing to folks that we have a community where you can meet others, where your neighbors will speak to you, all those things we take for granted living in the Quad Cities. And then also our diversity is extremely appealing and within Rock Island County, you know, if you want kind of a homogenous farm town, you can have that, if you want an urban loft, if you want diverse schools for your kids, so I think we have a lot of options where other places it's kind of one-size-fits-all.

**Participant 9:** I'd like to say that I find it very interesting that all of the sudden Illinois recognizes that they've got a wonderful selling point to settle here with the Mississippi River, because ... and the Rock River. I happen to live on the Rock River and, but in the 10 years I've been in this County, I've seen the development and how people have utilized this wonderful river that we have and some phenomenal things have been done. I think that what's been done right here in Rock Island is just to be commended. I want to ... and I heard Hope Creek mentioned several times ... my parents lived in Iowa. They lived in Davenport and they both have passed, but I ended up experiencing four different nursing homes, assisted living, senior living, in Iowa and I wanted to get my mother here in Illinois and she ended up at Hope Creek and I must say that that was the finest care that she ever had and she had the whole gamut of the highest and the lowest and that was an extraordinary job that Rock Island County did managing it. So I think we've got a lot of good people and ideas and we've certainly got plenty of room for development.

**3:** As far as here in Rock Island, the fitness center, our school system. My daughters have had a lot of opportunities that I didn't have when I was in high school with honors programs and AP classes and they're going to be college-bound here soon. We had the gifted program at Earl Hanson for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ... or 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> that they started off there from Horace Mann they went to Earl Hanson and then on through the programs, so that was a great opportunity.

**NC:** So, there's a lot of great services we provide, is that ... if I could sum up your comment, (Participant 3)'s comment, there are pretty good services?

**All:** Yeah

**Participant 4:** This is a unique ... it doesn't have to be unique just to Rock Island County, does it? It can be nationwide?

**Multiple:** No.

**NC:** No, no. It can be ...

**4:** I've always said, I don't think you can get a poor education at any school in the whole metro area. Now, there are some perceptions that yes (inaudible) of course the whole idea of test scores, which, you know, is ... seems to be ... an indicator, but if you look at some other indicators other than test scores, throughout the whole area we have students that are attending some top notch places all over the country and it's not like they all come from one particular school in one locale. I mean, there is a variety and so I would say, you know, the educational opportunities ... if there's anyone who wants to learn, there's no place that they can't go and ... that's too many negatives, there's a double negative or triple negative in there somewhere ...

**1:** But who's counting, (Participant 4)?

**4:** I don't know, I think Kai is over there.

**Kai Swanson (KS):** I was up to six

(laughter)

**4:** And the same thing, I think we're a real generous reason as far as I know. I think we've been relatively successful with support of things that need support. For instance, the latest one, and it's regional here, but the food drive. I think they just set another record with that type of thing. And I think that's fairly ... I don't see that where it's "Scott County gives like crazy," but I don't see that ... I think the whole area, we're pretty supportive and I think the people are ... I think people who visit the Quad Cities would say that the people are friendly in general. That's a blanket statement, I realize, but I think our people, as you said, the diversity we have in the area, the people in general, would be an asset worth ...

**NC:** You brought up the “bum rap” of the education system, so to speak. How would you accentuate and highlight all the positive things that you brought up over the prevailing native perceptions of the schools?

**4:** I can only speak for ... I suppose it could work anywhere, but I would say, “Look. These are the accomplishments.” And if you have a poor education system, and I’ll use Rock Island because I’m a retired Rock Island High School teacher, we have ... our band program is excellent. I mean, it is just ... it is excellent. You don’t have a poor school and have a great band program. And you can look at our graduates and where did they go? You don’t have a poor school system that can’t produce and have people successful in a whole host of secondary, you know. Now, do we have a number of people who don’t? Yes we do. But I don’t think that’s because they haven’t had an opportunity, I think. And that’s where, well, if you have average test scores of this, this is a direct reflection on the quality of your school and the quality of your teachers; I think that’s an unfair characterization. Is there a problem? Yes. Some connection’s not being made.

**KS:** We’re gonna be flipping the chart here in just a minute, but anyone who hasn’t had a chance to share a positive that would like to?

**Participant 8:** I think a positive thing that I’ve seen and the reason my wife and I moved to this area many, many years ago is the economic stability. This County always seems like it’s been solid and had, between manufacturing and retailing, even the Mom and Pop operations, that there’s plenty of job opportunities for people here. Traveling around, I’ve seen almost depression and things falling in other areas, and this one, even though we have our ups and downs, has been very solid, economic-wise and yes, we do have the big players like Deere and some of those, but we have a lot of manufacturing businesses that are not big, but are good and solid and offer a lot of opportunities. So, I think overall for the citizens that are in this area, there’s some economic stability.

**1:** I agree with you, (Participant 8). The fact that we have lost Farm-All and then we lost JIK’s and everything, but still, you know (**unknown:** and Caterpillar), yeah, and Caterpillar’s questionable, and stuff, but we’re still functioning pretty well.

**3:** You know, we have our colleges here as well – Augustana and Western Illinois University.

**Unknown:** And Blackhawk

**NC:** Alright, we are going to move on now, and this one is going to be a show of hands question. Raise your hand if you think the County government has a negative image. Think specifically of County government. Does it have a negative image? It is unanimous. Okay. (Participant 3), you kind of held out to the last second to raise your hand. What does ...

(laughter)

**3:** No, I ... can we move the courthouse?

**NC:** Where do you want to move it to?

**3:** Outside Rock Island.

(laughter)

**NC:** Interesting

**3:** No it's ... we get a bad rep in Rock Island because the last thing they hear is, no matter where it happens, "Live from Rock Island." Okay, well the crime didn't happen in Rock Island. It was ... that's where the courthouse is.

**6:** It's a media issue.

**NC:** That's interesting. So, yes, anybody want to explain why and talk about why you've raised your hand to show that it's negative?

**1:** I'll be the first one.

**NC:** We'll get everybody

**1:** Alright. The biggest perception I think we have, negative perception, is that we have 25 people that's on our County Board and you look at Boards in Cook County, you look at Scott County and everything like that, and they function quite well with far fewer Board members. And I think that is a ... right there, proof to me in a nutshell. Alright, so why do we have all these people? And what do they accomplish other than getting a stipend here or they're on payroll for retirement and things like that? So I think it's the perception.

**Participant 2:** Yeah, I agree. I mean that's what ... when you go out in the public and talk to other people, that's exactly what you hear. That's the perception, 100%.

**3:** I think they got a lot of bad press, the previous administration, and other scandals that were brought up and ...

**NC:** What other scandals? And we don't have to only talk about County Board here. State's Attorney problems, Sheriff problems, and ...

(laughter)

**3:** Oh well there is that, too. I was thinking the County Board. There's been issues elsewhere with the Sheriff and, yeah, the County. We've had a few, haven't we?

**NC:** And, so, the negative perception. How many of you learned about some of those things through the media?

**3:** Oh absolutely, yeah.

**Multiple:** Yeah.

**NC:** And, do you feel ...

**3:** You need some better marketing.

**NC:** Well, sure. Do you feel that the media coverage is fair?

**KS:** Before we get into that, are there other bad ... negatives that you've picked up on that we haven't touched on yet?

**7:** I think failure to adapt. I don't look at Rock Island County as super progressive or innovative. And that could be ... maybe it is and I don't know. But I think when I look at what many other private sector organizations have done ... I would always expect public to move a bit slower, but, you know, it doesn't seem like some of those contemporary practices have happened. And I think, so I'm in Human Resources at Augustana, so there's that. For me, it's hard to get past things like an early retirement incentive without a return on investment that ... "What? We didn't know we were gonna have to fill those positions" (**1:** Right). Those sorts of things are so painful

to read about and it undermines confidence in other things that are probably going well that I brush it with a big, broad stroke of distrust.

**2:** I agree with (Participant 7). I've spent time in the private sector – worked at Modern Woodman for 10 years, I worked with (Participant 7) at (inaudible) Systems and I've been in the public sector for 21 years and I would agree that the public sector is far behind the private sector when it comes to a lot of things. And a lot of it is, from a school standpoint it's funding. There isn't the money to have what the private sector has, but I agree. I will add one negative, and it's gonna counter (Participant 9)'s negative and I also have personal experience with Hope Creek and I believe the County needs to get out of managing Hope Creek. I think it needs to go over to the people who are experts at that.

**4:** I think there's ... I don't know how widespread, there's no way for me to tell, but I get the idea that there's a number of very, very good things going on, Hope Creek being one of them. But, can we afford to do this? The zoo – a wonderful facility (**Multiple:** Mmmhmm). Can we afford to have a zoo? Now, I'm not saying we must ... I don't have the answers to those things, but I don't know that the County is suffering from anything that the State, the country, I mean it's not a unique problem certainly at all. But you would just like to see some type of progress being made on "Hey, we do have this financial problem, and this is the steps we're taking to manage that problem." I'm not sure people understand what the actual problems are. I know they know something vaguely about money, you know, not having. But who has enough money? That's a pretty short list of people that I know and the government, I mean, I know some schools up in the Chicago area that I'm just amazed how in the world can you possibly spend that much money on things? But I've never ... I haven't seen that here. One of the things, and I don't know how it fits in this, well I guess it does fit in this, is we are, and am I wrong, an enclosed County that has not passed the sales tax that helps fund schools. I know Knox County if you drive down to Galesburg, what a fabulous facility that they have constructed. And it galls me, it sounds like I'm terribly (inaudible) and I try not to be, but every time I drive across the river I think, "Boy, they built that new auditorium over at Bettendorf High School ..."

**NC:** Do you think that some of the issues, like (Participant 7) brought up and (Participant 2) brought up, contribute to people not wanting to support that referendum?

**4:** Let me give you an example.

**6:** So, speaking of the referendum taxes to fund things, there's the one they tried to do for Hope Creek also, and I'm trying to speak to this as objectively as possible is ... I think that because of this perception with the government and with the scandals that have happened and this distress

that we have, there is less of an inclination to vote to pass some of these referendums to fund even schools, even though we would love to have more funding in the schools to, you know, to keep more teachers and to keep better programs and things like that, because we just don't know where the money's going to go. Right, like you said ... you've got how many people on the Board and where is all this money going to go? Is it going to go into their pockets? Or is it actually going to go to the programs that they're saying it'll be going in? And this is, I think, not just for the County. I think this is a statewide problem, which is why people are wondering why you'd even stay in the State of Illinois. Well, I was born here, grew up here, I love this side of the river, right? I can't see myself living in Iowa. I don't see myself as an Iowan. But I think for me, and I guess part of my generation to, is that distrust. We don't really understand where it's all going to go. You know, if .... Like you said, there's, kind of ... I think we stagnate a lot and we spend a lot of time thinking about making a decision, but not actually making it, which I think is why this whole issue with Hope Creek has gotten to the point to where it's at.

**Unknown:** That's an interesting observation.

**NC:** (Participant 8), does it sound like there's a trust issue?

**8:** Yeah, there definitely is.

**NC:** And you agree with it?

**8:** To a point, to a point. I think when I worked with the referendum, the biggest thing that I found is that you've gotta consider what the masses of people that do vote, do get involved, what their age bracket is. And their age bracket is the 50+ probably because I've got two kids that are 30 and 28 and they're not. So we're the ones 50+ that are out there voting and we're paying the property taxes and we're paying this and that and we don't have kids in school anymore, so those costs of additional taxes ... what came through the media is tax, tax, tax, tax. You didn't hear benefit, benefit, benefit, benefit. You heard, you know, "This is gonna increase your costs. This is gonna make more money." And people 50+ without being involved in a lot of things are gonna say "no" to taxes. And, you know, a good facility such as Hope Creek, although I have my thoughts about being involved, but raise taxes for people, say, you know, "We're paying out the rear end for property taxes right now comparably to what counties are." And add that on top of, and we have not a good high cost of living. You know, people are making below the means a lot of times around here, so tax really affects them.

**7:** I'll just say that, thinking in the 2008-2010 era for a lot of organizations, we did furloughs, we cut out vacation days, benefit costs raised, and maybe that happened in the County, but you

know, I personally have trouble giving more money until I know that some of those things that the rest of us have done, and I know it's much more difficult because you have several unions to deal with and these things take time, but there are groups, even symbolically, that could begin .. so knowing that almost every person employed in Rock Island County has taken a hit somewhere, my sample size of people that I know that work for the County is pretty small, but their stories and what they complain about I'm like, "Are you kidding? What? Your health insurance is how much? You have how many holidays plus vacation?" and so for me, it's hard to get on board. And I think the new Administrator has done a good job to talk about staffing levels and how to look at that. But you know, it's late in the game because we all did that 5-6 years ago and none of it came back when the economy came back. You know, it's trade-offs. That, I think, works against the County.

**NC:** (Participant 5), did you want to butt in?

**5:** Yeah, I think that there's a good point that you made that it's only recently that there has been a professional Administrator and maybe in recent years there have been better Board members that have come on, but it used to be maybe people that were looking for a little extra pin money and weren't as serious or knowledgeable about group practices. I ... in support of the unions, you know, maybe people think that's expensive but we need to have a professional workforce that has what the union movement would provide. But I think it's kind of a mistake to be spending money on things like pensions for part-time people and maybe health insurance for the elected officials. That isn't really necessary. Most of them have other jobs or other medical insurance.

**NC:** (Participant 9), have we heard your negative perception?

**9:** Do you think that Rock Island County has poor public relations, it seems like? We know what the media does. The media jumps all over something negative. But who do we have that is going to say, "Wait a minute, let's get three columns on something positive in Rock Island County" instead of, you know, they always seek out the worst situation and that doesn't necessarily represent what the overall picture is. They just say, "Oooh, that's really ugly. We'll get that on the front page." And I think we've got a public relation problem.

**NC:** Well, let's test that. Can any of you guys remember the last positive story you heard about County government?

**5:** I think you can blame some of it on Scott Reader with the *Argus-Dispatch*. He loves to find scandals in government. He's kind of right-wing.

**9:** Well, if you don't believe in yourself, how are you going to convince somebody else? I don't know. Maybe it's smoke and mirrors for a while, but we've got to get their attention that, "Look, let's start looking at some of the positives, the good aspects of living in Rock Island County."

**KS:** I would like to press on Nick's question because I know the answers. When was the last time you saw a positive news story about government in Rock Island County? Specifically about government in Rock Island County?

**6:** I thought it was very heartwarming during the battle for Hope Creek to hear the Hope Creek employees talk so passionately about residents and their fears for the residents and, you know, regardless of what side you end up on, I thought that was just wonderful that that message came through somehow.

**9:** I thought that it was kind of disheartening, though, that I spent every day and every day there for months but that the invitation was extended for people, the general public, to come take a look at Hope Creek. To see how the organization operates and see what outstanding care. I had the sad pleasure of knowing my parents got in Iowa and I was just amazed at how phenomenal ... Hope Creek went that extra mile and made ... they were so sensitive about people who couldn't even express themselves about what they wanted and what they needed, I was just so impressed with them compared to some of the other facilities and I was sorry that, you know, I even thought seriously about volunteering some work there just because I was so impressed with the care there. And I had financial issues and they were ... they jumped right on top of that. They took care of it in a very proper way and it wasn't offensive. I let them into my private finances for my parents and they just did outstanding things for me, so ... they got a bum rap, though. I don't know.

**6:** I agree. So, because my dad works there and he's been there for over 15 years now, I've heard every story. Out when it was still out in Coal Valley and when it's moved over here. But like you said, you know these people are very passionate, my dad is very passionate about what he does. He was involved in Project Now many, many years ago and when he retired from there, if he gets the chance to retire depending on what happens with Hope Creek, he's gonna get back into the public service sector because he's so passionate about that. And I think that one of the biggest things for them is that he knows that during this weird transition time that they're in, what's suffering is, forget the employees, and I mean that to an extent, he knows it's the residents and it's the residents that he's there for and they get, you know, you expose yourself financially and you get very vulnerable with that and I think one of the other things too is because that information isn't out there for the public to know that we're here to help you out

despite your financial situation, there's that lack of wanting to move forward with any kind of referendum or support to leave it open, whether it's run by the County or some kind of organization. You know, will that service still be there? You know? Or will it have to be ... you have to be able to afford all this or I'm sorry, you're out of luck.

**9:** I thought it was kind of interesting, my parents were able to pay for the services and, you know very well, many of the residents there were not in a position and they relied on state aid and such. And you would never recognize any difference between the ones that had private rooms and were paying residents and the ones that virtually had nothing. I mean, they treated everybody the same (**Unknown:** Yeah), there was no favoritism whatsoever. So I ... and I tried to get my friends to come look at Hope Creek because they were in the same situation with elderly parents and I said, "You've got to see what's available."

**4:** There's a perception, and I think this generally goes for public employees, that they don't work hard enough. They're spending someone else's money. They have way too many benefits. They're being paid far above what they should be. And I don't know how you contradict that. Usually that's by someone who has not gone anywhere near some of those entities ... I doubt anybody who ruthlessly criticizes Hope Creek has been in there. So the people who have the worst ... you know, schools "They have to be fiscally ... they have to be run like a business." When's the last time they stepped foot into a school? You know, "Teachers are paid far more money ... anybody can put a book in front of ..." When was the last time you went into a school and spent time? And I don't know what the answer is.

**7:** I will say with that, we interviewed several dining service staff during the Hope Creek time because they were worried about whether they would have a job and we couldn't afford any of them. And we can't afford them because we have to keep our tuition semi-affordable for our students and so, and I think we have benefits that will stack up to anyone at Augustana. We are very fortunate. We have, knock on wood, fought to hold onto those, but I will say, and these weren't people that have worked there 25 years. A couple of years of experience and they were way out of range for ... I think our job might be a little bit tougher just because we make everything from scratch and we ... our students probably aren't as nice sometimes as the residents out at Hope Creek, so you know, it's never apples to apples in any situation. But that does make me think, you know, while we're still a non-profit entity and we fight so hard to keep tuition affordable and it's by, you know, we're gonna have to keep searching, we'd love to hire this person but we can't afford them. And so, you know, I don't know how many of those tough trade-offs are being made. And they are tough.

**NC:** I want to give (Participant 2) an opportunity before we move on because I know some of the advocacy going on and you were ...

**2:** I just had a completely opposite experience, and maybe (Participant 9) since she was there every day, your parents probably did get better care because you were there every day and I heard other people that said, "I have to be here every day and then they will get good care." So, I'm just gonna throw that out there. It was my grandmother and I took care of her for 10 years, so I had her in three different facilities and got her out of Hope Creek as fast as I could. I had a different experience. I was a working mother. I couldn't be there every day and when I was there, it was very hard to get somebody to look at me. It was very hard to get someone to give me the time of day when I wanted to ask a question. So, you know, it was just a different experience. I also would like to tag on what (Participant 7) said, (Participant 4), because I agree with you ... all of us in school districts have a Board. We all have public ... we have a Board that ... it's paid no money. They get no benefits. And I think that they govern us better because they have no financial interest. They're not getting the pension ... they're not getting the same pension that we're getting. And I also agree, I have a Board member who took a 25% cut in pay to keep her job and yet had to sit and listen to me say, "We got a million dollar deficit. We've got a \$1.5 million deficit" you know. When do schools and counties have to balance their budgets just like the private sector has to do?

**NC:** I think that's a good segue because for the next two minutes, we are going to speak specifically about the financial situation. So based on what you've seen or heard in the press, describe the financial situation of our government. What is your perception of our financial situation based on those things?

**KS:** County. We're not talking about Springfield. We'd be here all night.

**NC:** No. That's right. (Participant 2), do you wish to continue on? You were starting to get there, I think. Your perception.

**2:** Well, I mean, that's my ... that's where I come from is that, well, I agree if you're part-time Board member, is it harder to make decisions when you are getting paid by the County and I think there ... I agree I think the Board is too big, I think it's tough to make those kinds of decisions when there are that many Board members. We have a hard enough time and we have 7 Board members. So, you know, I think you need to take a look at that. And again, when is it time to balance your budget and make cuts instead of raising taxes? I mean, we're all in ... the school districts are all in the same boat. And at some point, there's a mass exodus. I'm ... the CFO in the Moline school district, he said we might as well build another bridge because of

where we're located in the Illinois Quad Cities (**unknown:** Yep) ... very easy to live on the other side of the river. Work over here but live over there. So there's gotta be some kind of focus by our County by our school districts to start balancing our budgets and live within our means, like people have to do at home.

**5:** When you pick up the paper and you see what's happening to the Teamsters right now. People are losing and losing and losing and we're saying you've gotta pay more and more and more and yet they're looking at a part-time job and these people have concessions and we don't have anything. We can't hang onto our retirement fund that we've funded for 35, 40, 50 years, you know as it was in the paper. I feel sorry for the private sector. And we don't need to see more about how everybody on the other side is ... all the perks that they're getting because we're not getting any, you know. And we can't. We just can't afford it. I can't afford 16% more on my taxes ... I mean, wow.

**NC:** You wanna ... you've got properties and the property tax increase could affect ... or?

**6:** Yeah, so my parents grew up and they, you know, they immigrated here from Mexico and they worked hard their 40+ years they've been here and they've always been fortunate enough, I've always been fortunate enough, to live in a home, you know. They did have to downsize and move in the 80s when that downturn happened, but we have always lived in a home, they've always owned a home. They've always been debt-free from that. They've always owned multiple properties (inaudible) and things like that and they flipped it and turned things around and kind of got that thing going. You know, I think for them and even for certain ... the tax, the property taxes for me don't always make the most sense. So, in one block it's a certain percentage or even within the same block it's varying. I mean, I look at taxes all the time.

**5:** Is there someone who might describe how the property taxes ... the county portion of the property tax might work? Anybody want to give a good effort at describing it?

**9:** What do you mean?

**NC:** How the property tax system works and what that 16% raise means.

**5:** You mean the assessment?

**NC:** Yes

**9:** It's done through assessment

**NC:** Yeah, you guys are on the right track.

**5:** I don't know if there's any question about comparing different township assessors as opposed to having one County assessor. If we were to be more able, maybe, to compare.

**4:** 16% of what?

**KS:** To answer your question, when you get your property tax bill from the County, a lot of people don't understand, only a 12<sup>th</sup> of that, or as I like to say, one slice of a large Harris pizza, is going to the County. Most of your property tax bills are going to other taxing entities. And I didn't get a chance to answer your earlier question, (Participant 4). We have the lowest, the County has the lowest sales tax in Illinois – we're tied with Kankakee County. But municipalities can add rates as well as school districts when they get a referendum, so but what we're talking about in the County, on your property tax bill ... so, 16% is a gulp, but it's 16% of approximately 8% of your overall bill. So, that hopefully, some solace.

**4:** That's what I mean. When they say, "We're gonna double your taxes in this particular area," well, if I'm paying \$5 the slice of tax that I go to the small little entity is \$5 and it jumps to \$10, that 200% is gargantuan but an extra \$5 doesn't mean much and so you look at one and say, "16%?! We can't stand for ..." but in dollars and cents, what does it mean? And I also realize that when you say we need to tax more, we need to tax more, we need to tax more. But I don't think people have seen what is being cut also because I think people don't mind paying taxes if 1) it's well spent, and again that's a hard sell because public servants never work hard enough and you can always cut back and there's gonna be no cost whatsoever. That's often times the thought out there. But it's gotta be well spent and I've gotta see where that money, you know, nobody ever says, "Oh, the city filled the potholes again. I don't know what it cost, but dang them!" you know. Nobody ever complains about something being done correctly and there are a number of things being done correctly but it's the impression that 99 potholes can get filled but the one that doesn't is ...

**NC:** Go ahead, (Participant 5)

**5:** Well, you know, Kai was saying there are 12 different categories that take part of your property tax.

**KS:** Well, I don't know the exact number depending on where you are, but overall we're averaging about 12.

**5:** 12, okay, but the most ... the biggest taxing bodies are the schools.

**Unknown:** For property taxes

**5:** For property taxes. And the city comes after that, right? And then very small amounts for several other things like ...

**NC:** The townships, the buses, the Blackhawk College.

**Unknown:** The airport

**NC:** So, the way that Kai and (Participant 4) described that process, it is accurate. Were the rest of you aware of that process?

**Multiple:** Mmmhmm

**NC:** Okay. Were you not?

**9:** So what I understand is that the County takes 8% of the total property tax bill?

**KS:** On average, so what we asked them to figure is a home valued at \$100,000 it would be approximately \$38, or about \$3 per month of an increase. (Participant 3), we haven't heard from you in a while. What is your take on fiscal health of the County?

**3:** Well, as far as your, the sad thing is, you know, as far as local elections and these local referendums, the ones that affect us most directly have the poorest turnout. You're lucky if you get 10% of the people out to vote. So you're looking to 10% of the people to get ... and you have to sell this stuff, how it's gonna benefit the public. And not what you can do for us, but how is it gonna benefit the public. And I think we do need to consider our size of our Board. We haven't proved that larger is better and we also have ... we have township government, which is antiquated. That's what you have before cities are incorporated. When you have pioneers, you have townships. Then you get cities and county governments and you eliminate township. And then you have duplication of services. A lot of those services can be taken over.

**8:** A big thing, what he touched on is the perception of communication. The thing is, when taxes go up, especially on the County level, we do not also every day see what that goes to. We know in the back of our minds that we have forest preserves, we know we have zoos, we know we

have tangible services in the County but we don't see that or hear that as much as we hear and see everything else. When taxes go up, of course everybody else jumps on that bandwagon. The school does. The district does. But when the taxes go up in Coal Valley, they comment ... they communicate that it's because we need a new water tower. We can see some tangibles there. When the County talks about raising it, are we just trying to dig out of a hole or is there something, you know, that's tied to it. And that communication process, much as what we had with Hope Creek, doesn't adequately get out to people. There needs to be a communication either ... you know, the news is not gonna do it. Forget the media. But there has to be a communication that comes out of the County somehow. "Here's what we're providing for your taxes."

**3:** I think some of this stuff can be sold to the media and you've gotta get them on board.

**8:** (inaudible) and sell newspapers, that's not gonna happen

**4:** People want all these services and they ask for more services and I don't think they connect the two.

**NC:** How are some ways that we can communicate that better? Is social media an appropriate forum for that?

**4:** I suppose it would these days.

**2:** People aren't gonna care

**8:** Coal Valley puts out a flier that tells what's going on. Their website, if people want to get on it and look and follow the agenda. I get on the County Board's and read the agendas and minutes. But a lot of people don't do that. I think if there's some type of communication, and realize again our population. A lot of them's over 50. I've got a lot of people I know and they don't work with computers and don't Facebook and do this.

**3:** So how many people do show up to your County Board meetings?

**NC:** It seems to be if you cut out the Elected Officials and the Department Heads, probably a dozen. Last month it was quite a bit more. But before ...

**7:** I think you also have divisive messages and I don't know that there's a solution to that, but your ... the County Board doesn't speak with one voice and so to have one person come out

with a strong message that you're like, "Huh" but then another person on the Board undermines it with, "No that's not true because of this" ...

**NC:** Should the County Administrator perhaps be that one voice?

**Multiple:** Yes

**7:** I would say ... you know, I've heard his message which is ... to me a fear tactic that the only thing left to cut is the Sheriff. Really? Because we always get creative when we have to.

**8:** With organizations I've worked with, yeah we have a spokesperson. We don't want all of our individual members going out there and speaking to the media and saying things we don't want to say.

**5:** But they each speak to their own constituents.

**7:** Right.

**NC:** I'm gonna ask a quick question before we move on and we might have time for a quick break to stretch legs or use the restroom. But on the bottom of your paper, you do have a number 1 and a number 2 and above that columns "Yes," "No," and "I don't know." I'm gonna put this scenario out there for you now. How many of you would be likely to support an increase of property and/or sales tax at a voter referendum hypothetically held tomorrow?

**5:** You're not saying what it would be used for?

**NC:** Just as you understand things today, what your perception is today, would you vote yes, no, or are you unsure? Go ahead and place an "x" in either column. Okay. Have we tallied? Have you made your decisions? How many of you would vote for some level of sales or property tax increase tomorrow? Three. And how many against? 4. Alright. It's pretty split. Before we take this break, I'm going to read a brief statement. Our County Administrator has acknowledged that there is no more fat to be trimmed out of the County's General Fund that supports all the mandated functions of County government, though we can make changes to the County Board and future collective bargaining agreements that can relieve liabilities. In fact, unless something changes, layoffs including nearly 50 from the Sheriff's department might be the only fix. General Fund levy is capped and hasn't been raised in over 30 years. Most of the current tax increases are scheduled to be for only one year and have specific expenses that can be paid out of them, for example Social Security and pension. So with that, we can take a brief break and if you do

come up with specific questions that you have, jot them down and we'd be glad at the end to discuss them with you.

**NC:** The Governance Task Force was created to provide the County Board with specific goals and strategy for reforming County government. County Board members unanimously endorsed and participated in Strategic Planning sessions. The County Board committed to professional management of the County through the hiring of the Administrator and adopting a Code of Conduct and engaging in that strategic planning. The County Board wants the culture to change. We are going to show you several examples of strategic goals that the Governance Task Force wishes to recommend to the County Board. We want your thoughts on the reform, on strategy, and on culture change. So the first strategic goal: The County Board will eliminate x amount of members. Feel free to make a suggestion for x and also to tell us why it is a good idea and how that can change perceptions.

**KS:** And if you didn't pick up on it before, currently there are 25.

**5:** And it was just within recent memory that it was reduced, right?

**Multiple:** No

**NC:** The last reduction was 1981.

**2:** Didn't you have an advisory question on the tax ...

**NC:** Yeah

**1:** But it isn't gonna show up again until 2020, so it's gonna be a long time yet.

**2:** So you already had an advisory question for the voters? And the voters voted yes to reduce, correct?

**NC:** In fact, there were two. There was one in November 2012 that asked, "Should the County Board downsize to 3 districts with 5 members each?" That would be 15 members. Multi-member districts.

**3:** And they tied that in with a tax increase.

**NC:** Right. And then April of 2013 there was another question that said, "Shall the County Board keep single member districts?" Both of them passed. So there was a bit of mixed messaging. But I think it's simple that they want ...

**KS:** According to the constitution, you can't make the change between censuses unless you change the format (**2:** Right). So what the referendum may have said is they don't like the multi-member districts. As you might recall, with the old Illinois Constitution, that's the way the legislature was done. And that had a bad taste involved.

**7:** So there's 25 districts?

**KS:** 25 single-member districts. So, wanting to get back to the original question here, forgetting about the mechanics for just a moment, and knowing we can get there at the latest 2020 when the census rolls around, what would be that ideal size? How many would you eliminate?

**5:** And maybe have single-member districts? As an option?

**KS:** Yes, but I mean, forgetting about the methodologies for a moment, what do you think is an ideal size?

**6:** Do we have any best practices what's an average number for a population our size?

**KS:** That's a good question. I got a book when I came on board that Louis gave me, it's a little bit dated information, but ...

**NC:** Well, I heard from Don Jacobs just the other day he was saying it again, on average counties our size are 24 ½ members, so 25.

**4:** Is there any discussion about elimination of township. And the reason why I ask is I can't see ... I've heard it said townships are old and outdated ... I would think if you were gonna eliminate townships you might very well pass that by keeping the 25. That might be a third option. If that was ... if it proved to be a big savings that's not reducing representation of ...

**NC:** That's an interesting idea. So representation is a key element.

**4:** Well, I don't see you going down to let's say 15 members and getting rid of all township entities. I think that's ... I can't see anybody part of township government going for that. Maybe I'm wrong.

**5:** We have a really powerful state organization, Township Officials of Illinois

**7:** So, in a perfect world, I'd go down to 10 members. But I'm always for radical change, so rip off the Band-Aid. Let's go.

**8:** I'd like to see about 10 knocked off, but I'd also like to see ... I see no purpose in representing a township anymore because we're all so intermingled. There's no sense of it and I would do away with political party affiliations, mainly because I come from 20 years of school boards where we weren't Republican or Democrat and that sometimes throws a queue into it where we were elected at large.

**Multiple:** Right.

**NC:** I do wanna point out that we should ... and not that anybody would know all of these facts ... but what are things that the County government could do to change. Some things might require a solution from Springfield. What is it that we can do here, locally, to enact change?

**KS:** These are some great considerations because we're hearing this philosophy between representations and that's one of the things that's part of this is Board representation as it benefits your life from a County Board member.

**7:** I have no idea who my County Board representative is.

**KS:** (inaudible) versus townships, I mean as Nick said, we can't, we don't have that level of control. We'd love to have it, but when you think of the Rock Island County Board, what do you think is a good size? Do you prefer 10? Do you prefer 15? Scott County has 5, but they have a very large professional administration that supports those members. Right?

**1:** I'd go with 5. We've got a County Administrator now. Put more power with them and his judgment and things like that and go forward with that is my opinion.

**5:** I think the township issue is a bigger problem as far as taxes than the size of County Board. If we could eliminate townships, there would be a lot less taxes.

**KS:** It costs you on average, I think, between \$4-5,000 per year for a Board Member.

**NC:** Oh. Oh, well let's save the salary question for the next one.

**KS:** Sorry. Do we have any other thoughts on size?

**7:** To me, it's not as much about cost as it is efficiency and divisiveness.

**3:** The township thing has come up years ago, but it was a big thing with the parties (inaudible)

**8:** Well, I think a lesser number just, in numbers alone ... You can come to a better consensus and I mean, look at this table (**2:** Right) you, with fewer you can make better consensus ideas and get more thoughts through. The more people you have, everybody kind of goes off on their own tangent.

**NC:** I hope all of you run for the new County Board

(laughter)

**5:** But isn't a lot of the work done by committees?

**KS:** Yeah, there are five or six committees?

**Moose:** 6

**KS:** Six. Thank you, Moose. Six committees.

**3:** What are the committees?

**NC:** Governmental Affairs, Health and Human Services, Human Resources, Administration, Finance, Forest Preserve, Executive, and Public Works.

**5:** And if you get a consensus on a committee, does the rest of the County Board pretty much go along with it?

**NC:** Typically.

**7:** And the committees are staffed only with County Board members?

**Moose:** Yep.

**NC:** Now we are in a transition with that.

**KS:** With the Administrator, we ...

**7:** But you don't have people like us that would serve on a committee with County Board members?

**NC:** Correct. It's the voting members of the Board. So, let's go to our next one. Obviously there's consensus to go smaller with the County Board. I'm gonna pair this slide with the next slide, so "The County Board will end pension and health insurance for its members" and reduce pay by, on average, approximately 60% to \$2,400/year. Now let me explain where we get that \$2,400 from. Right now it's a hybrid structure for County Board members. \$2,400 is automatic salary,

plus \$100 for every meeting, which could come up to \$3,600. So if somebody attended all of their meetings, they would make approximately \$6,000. There are extra stipends for committee chairmen and the County Board Chairman, but on average, we would look at a 60% drop in salary to \$100 per meeting and having only two meetings per month instead of three and eliminating pensions and health insurance. What are your thoughts on such a specific example?

**Unknown:** Not enough

**2:** Well, I think that would send a very strong message to the public.

**1:** That we're really trying to improve and correct some problems that we have.

**NC:** It seemed as though earlier we were hearing some discussion about pay isn't fair anyhow. Is it ... should nobody be compensated?

**3:** Well absolutely, they should be compensated. I do question the pensions. When a part-time job for ... and how many years do you serve? I had to work 30 years to get a pension. And I don't feel good about giving somebody else out of my tax dollars a pension for working 10 years at a part-time job when I had to work 40 hours/week for 30 years to get it.

**KS:** I'm hearing two different things from different folks. On one side it's look at pension, health insurance, and pay separately because I hear that pension sort of stands out like a sore thumb, but on the other side I hear look at it all as one. Would you prefer to look at these questions as one or as two?

**3:** Well on health care, you know, don't the County Board members all have other jobs. I mean, it's not a full-time position. How many hours are they actually putting in?

**KS:** Well, just so you know, under the County's policies, a person would need to work an average of 30 hours per week to be eligible for health insurance. A person would need to work 20 hours per week to be eligible for the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund. On average.

**3:** That's fair.

**KS:** Right. So the question is, do Board members work 20 or 30 hours a week? And that's a question that the County Board's wrestling with.

**3:** Well obviously they work outside the meetings. I'm aware of that.

**KS:** So, do you want to take this conversation all as one package as part of your conversation or do you want to keep them separate? Because (Participant 3), it sounds like you are thinking of them separately. But (Participant 8), it sounds like you're thinking of them as one together. And it's helpful for us to know how you're viewing the question.

**7:** So you're saying that people are working  $\frac{3}{4}$  time for \$6,000/year. I reject that as a possibility. So, I think first of all, as professional employees, I would reject the hours per week and it would be a percentage of equal time load. So I would hope that every full-time employee that works for the County works more than ... if they're a salary position, they're not just working 40 hours each week. You know, yes we all check email from home, we do phone calls, and that's part of being a professional. So, to me, health insurance and pension are ridiculous. There's no chance those should stay there. I could argue either side of pay and if those two go away, I could stomach pay at \$6,000 ... \$8,000 ... pick a number.

**NC:** \$2,400

**KS:** Yeah, we picked a number for you. \$2,400.

**NC:** And it's based on attendance. Based solely on attendance for that money.

**5:** Is this a proposal that you've made and will be voted on?

**NC:** We haven't made any specific proposals yet. We wanted to test proposals with you.

**2:** Would you also reduce the number of Board members or are you saying this versus ...

**NC:** No.

**2:** Okay, so in addition.

**KS:** We're kind of saying both.

**NC:** We are having all of these goals as complete goals that we want to bring up.

**Moose:** If you do the math, 5 County Board members at \$45,000 apiece across the river and 25 at \$2,400 so you do the math, I mean you got 5 of them (**NC:** In Scott County) at \$45,000 a year.

**NC:** Plus benefits. Do you know these things about Scott County? I know you don't live there. But does it seem like we're always getting compared to Scott County?

**1:** Oh, sure.

**NC:** Okay, the next goal we're going to go to then is, and I don't have a slide for this one so we'll just keep it on that one, "The County Board will adopt a comprehensive 5-year budget and capital improvement plan." That's never been done before. All budgets have been passed one year at a time. There is now work being done to do a full, comprehensive, 5-year budget and capital improvement plan. Does this give you a good feeling or a bad feeling and if it's good why?

**1:** What's included in your capital improvement plan?

**NC:** You might have to help me out with this

**KS:** Capital improvement is often used to refer to the aging infrastructure of the County (**NC:** I don't know if it means a brand new courthouse. It might just be general upkeep). Remember that there is and this has been in the news, the justice center, but even if you remove that, the facilities of the County are aging (**1:** That's right) whether they're bricks and mortar, whether they're the (inaudible) at Loud Thunder, whether they're vehicles that are driven by County employees.

**Unknown:** County roads?

**KS:** County roads would be all part of infrastructure. For the most part, because that's funded ... it's got a funding mechanism, I know as a bike rider that Rock Island County does a very good job on its roads. You notice when you cross the County line and I've always been proud of that. But our infrastructure, in answer to your question, has to do with the bricks and mortar of the County and that is as opposed to ... Now the 5-year plan if I understand it correctly, under state law, state statute, we would still approve a budget per year, but you would also as a County have a planning document, which would be that 5-year where you would make anticipation of revenues and expenditures and then budget accordingly. Whereas in what you've seen, the budget history of the County is that a prior reserve has been eroded on a yearly basis by dipping into those operational reserves to make the budget balance. The County is beholden by state law to come up with a balance at the end. How it gets to that may not always incorporate top-shelf accounting practices.

**2:** I would like to hope that you already have a capital improvements plan. You have to know when you have to do tuck pointing and when you've got to do roofs and ...

**NC:** They don't

**6:** You live in Rock Island County, right?

**1:** They don't

**2:** Well, I have, but I'm also a public servant and you have to take care of your facilities and you have to have an operation and maintenance division that does that.

**NC:** That was some of the fat that was trimmed.

**1:** That does not happen.

**7:** I think every institution has to make those tradeoffs, right? (inaudible) and we have our goal. I mean, in general, is it a great idea to have a 5-year plan? Absolutely. My worry would be that we're tied into that and we still have to be nimble. Things change. State government changes. You know. A large employer leaves. I think you still have to be nimble. But I positively react to the idea of a plan. I wouldn't want to adopt a budget that we have to, we're then handcuffed to.

**NC:** The plan would be, and we can go to the next one and just kind of melt all the conversations into one. So, the plan out of this 5-year budget capital improvement plan would be with a goal toward making sure the County Board has a healthy fund balance. "The County Board will enhance the General Fund balance to maintain 25% reserve, which is approximately \$7.1 million." At this time, the reserve is down to 2.5%.

**5:** Isn't 25% a little high?

**NC:** I will defer to some business professionals to say what your best practices are on maintaining a balance.

**GM:** That would be high. Very high.

**6:** It's relatively high

**2:** I think so, too.

**NC:** This is a number that was developed by Dave Ross, County Administrator. For government purposes.

**2:** From a school district standpoint, we're told in the General Fund 90 days cash on hand is average. 90-120. 120 would be the high end.

**NC:** So 90 would be the 25 percent?

**2:** 90 days.

**7:** 90 days would be a 25% reserve?

**6:** Right, so it would be 3-months' worth of the budget. Which I guess makes sense. I mean, from that standpoint, I guess looking at if you're gonna plan for five years, which I completely agree you need to do because the fact that you haven't ... it's your overhead costs, I guess if you're looking at it from a business perspective. What do you see yourself investing in in the next 5 years for your overall capital, for your improvement? I mean, work at John Deere, right? And I worked with facilities and maintenance and every year, yes, we have to pass a budget and how much money we're gonna spend on capital, but overall there is a five year plan to say, okay we have to replace this many feet of roof, this much asphalt, this much this. And you know, how are we going to input it into this year's budget so we can get it done? And then obviously you have downturns in the economy and things like that as we all have seen in the news. How do we trim the fat while still being able to maintain our overall operation for the health and the safety of our employees and also our customers that we're delivering to? So, I think when you're looking at this and you say 25% seems like a lot, well what if we have a disaster with the bridge? Not talking about I-74, that's a whole other situation, but ... (**KS:** A County road) ... A county road or a County bridge where we see that they haven't been upkept for a number of years and something happens, you're gonna need some amount of healthy budget to put in there and make sure it's safe.

**KS:** Another way to look at this is, and this came up earlier when we were talking about this ... you had at one point a nearly \$10 million, nearly. So it's healthy to have a three-month reserve in case you have a one-time, unforeseen expense. What's happened is as a budgeting practice, that has been eroded incrementally over time so now when it gets down to the flickering red of your fuel tank, that's when you have no choice but to say, "We can't keep schlepping these funds from IMRF here or the social security here." We are at a point where we have to do this 16.8% for two years. That one is a temporary one.

**NC:** (Participant 2), what are some negative implications that can happen when you have a fund balance at 2.5%?

**2:** Well, exactly what Kai is saying. I don't even know how you can borrow ... are you borrowing from other funds? Or are you abating from these funds and just pulling out of ... I mean, we can't do that in the school district. So I'm appalled.

**NC:** We have a tax anticipation warrant.

**2:** Okay. Alright. That's not good. That is not good.

**NC:** What that means is that the flow of cash ... the property taxes which are only about 20% of the General Fund revenue anyhow, they come in June. That's when they get paid. That's when they come in. So you're going half the year without revenue from the property tax coming in which causes a cash crunch that beginning part of the year. Which is when we have to borrow. When we get the taxes paid back, we pay back the loans and we try to function from there.

**KS:** So if you could put these other levies to levels that they're recommended to be at, you don't have to borrow to make payroll. Which I think is a good practice, not borrowing to make payroll.

**7:** Assuming that our payroll is at a correct (inaudible) to begin with

**1:** Well, I think about payroll, I think there's not fat there. I can speak from the Health Department's standing and they provide a lot of services with a minimum staff and everything else. I think it's generally felt that all the departments are pretty much like that. I think the problem is, we have to realize, I think the County's been kind of, pardon the analogy, but going by the seat of their pants for so many years that it's just been standard practice and now it's time to pay the piper and it's not gonna be fun, but it's gotta be done.

**NC:** So given these sorts of specific goals, and we wanna now go to number two. That same referendum being held after these goals were implemented. How would you vote?

**5:** Including the previous one?

**KS:** All the reforms we discussed. Were all of those to be implemented.

**9:** Reducing the Board

**KS:** Yes

**9:** Reducing the Board, eliminating the pension and healthcare

**KS:** Right. Reducing pay and compensation. Make sure we've got those. The adoption of a plan, annual budgets, but 5-year budget plan, plus a capital improvement planned that is aimed at the 3-month reserve. Those are the key reforms.

**NC:** How many of you changed your vote, probably from no to yes?

**KS:** Did anybody change from no to yes?

**NC:** Three. How many of you kept your vote the same, no? One. So we now have 1 no vote and the rest ... okay. So considering all of this, what else would you change about Rock Island County and why? And nothing can be off limits on this one.

**4:** How are you talking?

**KS:** Is there something you ...

**1:** If you had a wishlist

**NC:** Whether we have the power or not

**KS:** Is there something you would say, "You really need to consider this."

**NC:** Getting an Olive Garden in Rock Island. Something like that.

**1:** That's right.

**KS:** I want a Noodles and Company.

**7:** I just think you have to address ... I don't disagree that people work hard. But every other organization with the advent of technology has been able to have fewer people and maybe that's happened at the County that I'm unaware of. I think you have to, if we feel like these are ... we can't operate with any fewer people than we have now ... one, I will challenge that because when times get tough, we always figure it out. We get creative when we have to. But even if you

couldn't, I think you have to say in the Health Department, "We can't offer these same levels of services," so maybe we don't do as much.

**5:** (inaudible) fewer people. It seems like a lot of businesses and organizations have reduced their staff and made everybody work more hours and everybody's quality of life goes down and maybe the quality of work goes down. So it doesn't seem like that's a good thing, you know, to do more with less people.

**9:** Sometimes you create new problems, you know, and you can only reduce services so much and we will reduce services by reducing the amount of employees. But like I had a little meeting, what was the social event? On my road. And we are outside of Moline, Coal Valley Township, we're outside the city limits of Moline. And when they were talking about reducing services, the Township said, "We're not gonna be able to mow along the roads anymore because we have to cut our fuel costs and blah blah blah," well then everybody is starting with a whole new thing that is going to happen because I live in a flood area and they said, "How will we ever get the road cleaned up if we've got weeds that are 10-foot tall and there's a flood and the water goes away and you've got a mess?" So, you're going to ... there's gonna be new problems and there's gonna be new money that's required to fix some of the problems because you cannot maintain the services that people are used to and they've built their homes around those services and they expect and figure they're paying plenty of tax and they deserve it.

**NC:** Can any of you articulate what you think some of the ... and this is what the General Fund is for, to pay for the mandated functions of County government. What are some of those mandated functions, if anyone can think about those?

**NC:** What is the requirement?

**7:** I think our jails are a mandated function.

**NC:** Good. Any other mandates that the County serves out for the state or national government?

**1:** In the Health Department, there's quite a few. Public safety.

**4:** I know roads have to ... there's quite a few requirements for roads. I mean you can shut down a road, not use the bridge, but there are things that you have to...

**9:** But that was another thing that was brought up. The maintenance of the road. The surface of the road. And I don't know a lot about asphalt and topping it with oil and gravel and all that. But

there was consideration that if they don't do that any longer, we'll never get it back. It was just the deterioration is just gonna get worse and worse and worse. And that's true. When you take it away, chances are, you're never gonna get it back.

**7:** I do think it's not an either-or. So your example of mowing, so we're not gonna mow at all. Maybe instead of mowing every other week, we mow every third week. I could live with a shaggy lawn.

**9:** Oh, I totally agree. But even the township workers, there's a little panic there. Because they are incredible. They give us the best service I've ever seen. You know ... my mother lived a block from North Park and my roads were cleared of snow and she was still waiting for 10 days to get hers cleared.

**KS:** Would it surprise anyone to know that the County spends a great deal of money to run elections? And we're mandated. And some of the rules are mandated based on ... some of the things are things we might agree with philosophically. It should be easy for a concerned, engaged citizen to vote. But to make it happen, like with these same-day registration, things like that, requires a healthy influx of cash to make sure there's not fraud.

**NC:** And election judges and equipment. Another fact that Mr. Jacobs always points out to us is that 85% of the General Fund funds the jail and the courts.

**KS:** And the justice center. Forget about the physical building. Think of all of the people required to make sure that records are accurately kept, that everyone is safe when they come to the courthouse (**NC:** That prisoners are housed), that prisoners are housed in a way that is respectful for them but also of the general populace if they're violent offenders. There's so many facets to this, and it's really amazing, the intricacy of it.

**2:** So what's coming out of the General Fund that's not mandated? Is the zoo, is Hope Creek, is the Forest Preserve?

**NC:** No, that's not.

**2:** Those are all separate?

**KS:** And on that note, I know we're running out of time. When Nick asked you if you had seen any positive news stories about the County ... in the last 45 days, there have been masthead editorials praising the County for its openness to change on the way Niabi Zoo is run and its

openness, the leadership's openness to changing, this culture shift and looking at best practices. So the lesson here is, I was a reporter for about ten years, people don't remember the good stories.

**Multiple:** That's right

**KS:** As a news consumer, you don't remember those as well as you remember a negative. So, I mean, a lot of politicians, I'm not talking about anybody in the County of course. Nobody in the County. But let's say some other country, politicians know that and they want you to consume negative stories rather than positive stories.

**5:** Well maybe, and I think I mentioned before that things have been getting better the last 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 years (**KS:** Yes, yes), especially with the County Administrator and a few better County Board members, so it takes a while to catch on.

**KS:** Yes, it does. But it is an interesting little phenomenon. I didn't know Nick was gonna ask the question that way.

**3:** But it still goes back, there has to be a means of better communication out there. It's in the editorials. How many of us, and I'm an avid newspaper reader, flip past the editorials because it's opinionated, you know.

**Multiple:** Correct, right

**3:** So, we'll glance, but we'll go to other facilities. It's still that communication process. The Chamber of Commerce and those groups, the schools, they all do good communication. You need to get on in that.

**KS:** The lesson is very well-received.

**NC:** So if there aren't any other remarks, I'll just end in saying this is a process that we're continuing to undergo. This is the second focus group; there are two more scheduled and we may even add a fifth one with a whole other group of people in December. We do plan to have these Governance Task Force recommendations out to the public January or February. All in an effort to change the communication, to communicate better what we do and why we do it, and also to embrace that culture change that the County Board has begun to. We need to make it stronger. We need to make it solid. We need to make it last. So that is what our group, what Kai and I serve on with this Governance Task Force, is going to be doing over the next few months.

We can alert you when we have events. I think we may have a public hearing when we release the entire plan and we may invite you to be apart and to share your experiences. We also encourage you to share your experiences in any way that you know how or are able, whether that's letters to the editor or Facebook posts or speaking at our public meetings. We would welcome your input on anything and everything. So that's where we're gonna go from here. Is there anything else that anyone wants to add or get clarified and we can turn the recorder off ...

**5:** I'm curious. You had this exact meeting last Monday. Is that correct?

**NC:** Tuesday. Last Tuesday.

**5:** And the same material was presented at that meeting, right?

**NC:** The one change was the one I made with the lumping the benefits and the salaries together.

**5:** Do you see a consistency in input from the audience here and the audience you had last week?

**NC:** No. No, I don't.

**5:** That's kind of interesting.

**KS:** But there was some common ground.

**NC:** There were lots of common themes. One of the things that was surprising to me about last week's was there was a lot of talk about the cities and the barriers they put up, seeming that they are all pulling on different ropes instead of the same rope when it comes to economic development. And what I've been researching for a long time, and it was before I was born, was this idea of Super City, and it actually got brought up last week.

**5:** Really?

**NC:** Yep, and that was an interesting concept that I wasn't expecting. There was also an element, there were some younger people at last focus group and they began to really raise some hell when they thought the representation was going to get taken away by downsizing the Board members and taking away salaries that it would make it hard for them, for an average person, a

low-income person, to get involved. So that was an interesting concept raised, all under for review.

**9:** I guess I don't understand that.

**6:** That they would see themselves maybe aspiring to be a County Board member and without the perks or the pay, or fewer of them, that would be a barrier.

**NC:** It would preclude low-income people and it would ... personally, their representation, not that they would want to be the representative, but that their representation would be taken and be less personal to them. We followed up with, "What does representation mean to you now?" Any other thoughts?

**4:** Is there any ... are you seeking any input from just employees. Here you're trying to get, I suspect a variety of people, and oftentimes when changes take place, the people who are actually doing the job are sometimes overlooked.

**KS:** I've learned already in just a few months on the Board that employees are not at all shy about sharing their opinions (laughter), which is a good thing.

**2:** That is true

**KS:** But I'm very impressed with the County that they have a structure, and Moose was kind enough to ask me to be on the Health Insurance committee, where employees and a County Board member and Department Heads and Elected Officials come together to map out the health insurance questions that the County faces. And I'm proud to say that under the leadership of others, we've reduced expenses well into the six figures for next year.

**NC:** Trying to get a good, strong fund balance built back up

**2:** You're self-funded, aren't you?

**NC:** Self-funded, self-insured.

**KS:** So there are avenues for ... I don't think there's a focus group like this ...

**4:** And it might not be necessary to have one

**NC:** On research, it is supposed to be a representative sample of the County. I think there may have been retired employees of the County, but on the whole it's representative. We can have other sitdowns, not a focus group where we're gaining a research perspective, but at least a hear-out. And, like I said, a public hearing, everybody will be invited to those.

**5:** This is another issue about the level of efficiency or professionalism of the elected County officials and ... I haven't got any specific information that some of them are not running a tight ship, but you know, like the Recorder and the Clerk and, oh I don't know, five or six people? That are elected? And not that they shouldn't be elected, but do they get some input from professional management practices experts or something like that?

**KS:** I've noticed that some of them have professional organizations that they're very active in. April Palmer, our Treasurer ...

**NC:** Auditor. She's our Auditor.

**KS:** I'm sorry. Newbie. She just received an award from her state association. I know that Sheriff Bustos works with the state and national organizations, so that's a very good question. I think it's something that we as voters should expect from all of them.

**NC:** I think that Mr. Ross has indicated to me anecdotally that a lot of them have reached out to him on a lot of advice and topics for help, so Mr. Ross has been a good step. Even though he works for the County Board, a separately elected entity, they're still coming in and doing things together.

**2:** I have a question. As a Board, for instance, you had this early retirement incentive that you offered your police officers and I don't know who else. How does that recommendation come to the Board? Does it come from the Chairman? Does it come from your Administrator? Because I think that was before Mr. Ross was here ...

**NC:** Phil Banaszak and Don Jacobs, Finance Chairman, and the County Board Chairman Banaszak, they both looked into it, and an HR Director looked into it more. And it did reduce General Fund expenditures. It did not reduce IMRF expenditures.

**2:** No. You must have a huge unfunded liability.

**NC:** But like you said, the General Fund is capped, so it freed up a lot more room in that General Fund. Whereas that other levy, that IMRF levy, was not capped it and could have been, it was

raised. So that is how there was a little bit of breathing room provided. Overall if you would have just let it take its course and let the people retire in the 3 or 4 or 5 more years, you would have had a lot more savings on both funds.

**2:** Oh, yeah. But it is your Chairman that comes to the Board and makes the recommendation?

**NC:** At that time it was because that Chairman sat over here and was, full-time I suppose, \$90,000. Now we've got \$22,000 part-time.

**2:** Okay

**Moose:** Well, what happened on that early retirement is the County Board Chairman took it upon himself to issue letters to those who were available, and I can't speak fully on all the issues that was discussed before coming to the Board, but just like Nick said, in some areas it did improve, give us a little breathing room on that General Fund. But when it come to realizing where he made his cuts, and I'm not patting myself on the back or blowing my own horn, when he cut all the maintenance people out, there was one person left to blow snow last year on four or five lots and that was me. So, you know, like I said it sure was a confusing time for the County.

**NC:** Yep.

**KS:** I think with a broad brush, one of the things, I sort of come in a little bit late on that party, but what I'm impressed with especially under Moose's leadership is there seems to have been prior to this time, and prior to the County Administrator, a rather substantial gap between where we are and what might be considered best practices. And with Moose's leadership and with a professional Administrator, we are working aggressively to close that gap. Unfortunately, nobody likes to pay for past mistakes. But we as taxpayers are the ones who are going to have to do that. What I'm pleased to see is I don't think it's gonna cost ... it's not gonna take as much time or money as I initially thought to get there. And we're certainly, I think moving in the right direction. We're never fast enough, you know, but we're moving in the right direction.

**7:** Nick, I wonder if the County Board would be open to having, if you shrink your size obviously workload increases, having volunteer members of your committees. Because I do think, you know, there are people who are ... an early retirement incentive, people have walked that way before and can give you the metrics to look at and there's probably, everything, it would still have to be adapted. But if you change your structure, being open to having volunteers. I mean, we're all here because we care about the County to do that sort of work.

**NC:** Thank you.

**KS:** One thing, great suggestion, one thing that Nick hasn't quite gotten to here, but here's another thought: reducing the number of committees. If you're going to pay for a professional HR Director, do you need an HR committee that's meeting with the same regularity, for instance?

**NC:** Kai's right, and I didn't make a slide for that. Should I for future ones?

**Multiple:** Yes.

**NC:** Because I think that would explain how I come up with the instead of three meetings, two meetings.

**KS:** But Lauren, your idea's well (inaudible), but I think that's a good idea.

**NC:** And there are 21 outside appointments that can be made. Some of them have to be County Board members, like to the Board of Health or Arrowhead. Arrowhead bylaws say a County Board member has to be on there. There are several more that it can just be a simple County resident and right now a county Board member fulfills that.

**7:** Or even, you know, encourage your HR Director because you have a professional one ... to have a committee of just people that advise (**KS:** An advisory committee) to help with those sorts of things that people are stretched thin, you don't have to take everything on yourself.

**KS:** This County really cares.

**2:** I do recommend a Finance Committee, though. You need that oversight.

**KS:** That'll still be there, right.

**2:** I think you need that oversight.

**8:** I think a good step has been made, first of all, that Administrator's addressing things and the Board's addressing things. The fact that you went out and seek citizens' input is a good step. I would challenge the next step to be involving people more, be it, not the hard one, the school board, we involved citizens on committees actively. They didn't have the voting power, but they were active. To involve people. That's part of the communication process. And I would also

challenge Board members to address their constituents. We happen to have a good Board member that does knock on doors and has a newsletter and a Facebook page you can communicate, but those people that represent those people, they do have to ... we're not going to come out to a Board member. Sometimes a Board member has to come out. They need to communicate.

**1:** That's right.

**NC:** Good advice. Good advice. Anything else for the good of the Board before we let you out a little early? I think we told you 8:00 on the phone. Is that what we said?

**Multiple:** Yes

**4:** I was worried ... not worried, but concerned that many a great idea has been killed by a focus group. And one of the things that (inaudible) things we've been involved in is you put in time, you help out thinking some decision will be made, you didn't need to show up. The decision's already been made. And nothing is so irritating as something like that. I shouldn't say furious, because I know you both mean well, but I'm happy that it was quite the opposite. I think you guys are dastardly but in a different way.

(laughter)

**6:** Thank you for taking this on. I think this is a very brave thing you're committing to in trying to lead the way here, so don't be dissuaded by divisive opinions.

**KS:** Those are very helpful. A sign of a healthy organization is to have respect for adverse opinions.

**8:** Now, nobody likes paying taxes, but nobody wants their services cut, either. I don't think your public realizes how much the County does do for them. That's the problem.

**Moose:** Well, one thing I don't think a lot of people understand, and that's in our Treasurer's Dept. The Treasury Dept. of this County takes in \$222 or \$223 million a year and our portion's 75. That's how much money flows through this county that people don't understand.

**2:** And they do a fine job of passing it on to us.

**Moose:** If you go to the Auditor's Dept. that Kai mentioned just got recognition from the state, it's her and 3 employees. Louisa, it's her and I think 4, maybe 5 down there, that handle \$225 million.

**2:** And I will say when ... and before Louisa when LouAnn was here, she did a great job listening to Superintendents and Business Managers. We want our money ACH, just like you said with technology, can you send it to the bank. We don't need that check. She made it happen. So, they listen when we call up and we ask and talk to them about our assessed values and things like that. I'm always able to get somebody on the phone and answer me in a timely manner, so that's good. We are getting those good services.

**Moose:** And going back to individuals participating, you know. God bless you, but you take a place like the highway dept. or the forest preserve or the health dept. or, you know, there's so many different entities here. But just like the highway dept. because somebody was talking about patching the roads and stuff, to get somebody who understands motor fuel taxes and bridge and all these entities which your tax dollars are sorted out. You know, we got special assessment areas like Zuma Creek and what's the other one out there? The one over by Hillsdale. There's Zuma and Hillsdale and whatever it is. There's special assessment areas out that way, so it's these different entities that you just select a person to get involved in or two or three, which is good. And here again, I want to just thank these two guys, and especially Nick. When I come on this Board and accepted this job, like he said, I took a \$70,000 cut which I accepted because I'm old, but I am driven and I like Nick. I can't say enough for him. We really, we didn't struggle too much, but when I selected Nick for Vice-Chairman and you can see why. I don't have to say anymore than what's been presented to you right here tonight. (**NC:** I left my wallet at home to pay him). This is where we're at. Anyway, I think this is an eye-opener of where we're headed with a guy like Nick at the helm and Kai right behind him.

**NC:** A great wingman.

**Moose:** There again, with Mr. Ross on board learning, we've got new staff up here. Well, the whole staff up here is new, but they're learning quick, you know. Just like the farm at Oak Glenn, there was back in '07 we sat down with a group of people and tried to figure out what to do after we moved out of there, and tearing it down, and what are you gonna do with the water tower, and I think that's gotta come down and just be scrapped out. We're gonna move the shooting range out there that used to be up at the golf course because the sheriff deputies shoot just about across the room here. We can get into long rifles and things like that in that grass area out there which don't include the farm, the 180 acres. And then there's been different programs come around in the farm area. Pollination's a big thing now, so we've taken 5 acres

and we're gonna put it into this pollination thing for the butterflies and bees. And then just get our borders and our waterways straightened out and get into Pheasants Forever and increase our CPR and stuff. There's another thing that maintenance was taken out of the picture so it hasn't been maintained 'til I went out and Steve Ballard and I took one of the new ladies here.

**KS:** If you're like me, you're gonna come up with an absolutely perfect comment about 10 minutes after we break, and I just want to remind you that all of us, Moose and Nick and I, our email addresses and phone numbers are on the County website. So if you think of something later that you'd' like to share ... if you share it with me, I'm gonna funnel it right through to Nick, so don't hesitate to do that, now or in the future. Especially when you look at the package that comes out in February. If you think something is missing, we may turn to you; we may need support to get this through.

**1:** So we will receive an email or something

**NC:** We've got all your emails. We want to keep you updated on the process. Thank you for spending your time with us.

**KS:** And I appreciate your taking the time