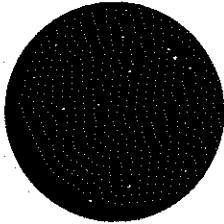


# APPENDIX

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# **The Case for Government Consolidation**



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# The Case for Government Consolidation

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# The Case for Government Consolidation

*The adequate organization of modern metropolitan areas is one of the great unsolved problems of modern politics*

Charles Merriam (1942)

## Introduction: The Challenge

The cities of Upstate New York (including the Syracuse metropolitan area) are experiencing a number of trends that present challenges for the future:

- Globalization has eliminated jobs (Thomas 2003).
- Economic inequalities between the core cities and the suburbs have increased.
- Political inequalities between the core cities and the suburbs as well as within both have grown (Imbroscio 1997).
- Educational opportunities are dramatically unequal.
- Members of racial and ethnic groups live in balkanized neighborhoods (Orfield 1997).
- Civic participation is declining in the inner city because of frustration over the lack of resources and in the homogeneous suburbs because of a lack of interest (Oliver 1999)
- Poverty rates have increased and families living in poverty have become more concentrated (Orfield 1997; Pendall and Christopherson 2004).
- Urban neighborhoods have deteriorated even in cities where the downtown business districts have become vibrant.
- Economic development has become stagnant (Pendall and Christopherson 2004).
- Personal incomes lag behind the nation (Pendall and Christopherson 2004).
- Cities are not capable of financially supporting themselves and are on "lifelines" from the State.
- High taxes and heavy regulation have made it difficult for businesses to operate.
- The metropolitan populations are stagnating, but urban sprawl continues.
- The cost of maintaining and improving the metropolitan infrastructure continues to rise (Muro and Puentes 2004).
- Onondaga Lake remains one of the most polluted bodies of water in the United States. If clean, it has incredible potential for recreation.

Although some of these challenges are beyond the scope of local government to respond to (e.g., a globalized economic system), other challenges are manageable if local governments have the will and power to do so (e.g., urban sprawl). In other instances problems stem from or are impacted by state and/or federal policies. In those instances

local governments must be organized in such a manner to be able to influence the shaping of policies to assure that they help to solve or at least alleviate problems, rather than create new ones.

Presently, the challenges above are being dealt with in most metropolitan areas (and in the Syracuse area) by governance structures that were constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Recognizing the antiquated nature of local governmental forms that result in fragmentation, many metropolitan areas across the nation have moved in the direction of greater integration and consolidation (for a list of those different forms of integration see Appendix A). In doing so they hope to create governance institutions that will make the most sense from economic, environmental, and equality viewpoints.

This study will examine the arguments in favor of greater government integration and consolidation. In doing so, it will also indicate what some of the limitations of consolidation are and what some of the obstacles will be in attempting to move in that direction. It is not intended as a blueprint for change, rather it will highlight the advantages of consolidation while at the same time making a realistic assessment of its limitations.

At the outset it should be noted that government reorganization is not a silver bullet; it will not solve all problems. Although government is a powerful force, metropolitan areas are governed more by urban regimes composed of coalitions of government, business, and civic leaders (Stone 1989). What's more, for urban policies to be effective they must mobilize the support and participation of citizens who live and work in their communities. Citizen support must be garnered not just to achieve changes in the governance structures, but it must be sustained to assure that greater equality is also achieved.

### **A Brief History of Consolidation**

Government consolidation is not a new idea. Indeed, most cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries experienced significant population growth through annexation (especially in the East). While the more recent wave of consolidation and consolidation attempts is occurring for different reasons, both have been initiated in order to obtain more power to

be able to more effectively plan and control economic, social, cultural, and political development.

The modern wave of government consolidation dates back to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In general, there are two different forms of consolidation: consolidations that created new metropolitan governments by merging cities and counties, and those metropolitan areas that enhanced the fiscal, management, and service capacity of the county by creating two-tiered governmental structures whereby the county provides relevant county-wide services while local government structures provide services of a local character.

The city/county consolidations discussed in this report are Baton Rouge, Nashville, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, and Louisville.

*Baton Rouge.* In the aftermath of World War II the Baton Rouge metropolitan area experienced significant population growth, both within the city of Baton Rouge as well as in the surrounding suburbs. The East Baton Rouge Parish responded poorly to the increasing demands for services and as a result civic leaders, led by the Chamber of Commerce, placed the issue of consolidation on a referendum submitted to the voters in 1947. The referendum passed by a narrow margin.

Local Baton Rouge politicians credit consolidation with enhancing fire protection, establishing comprehensive zoning regulations and building codes, developing a major street and drainage system, the construction of a municipal dock, and creating a new civil service system for local employees (Kean, Jr. 1956).

*Nashville.* After years of bitter fighting and one referendum that defeated a consolidation proposal the Nashville-Davidson County consolidation plan was approved by both the city as well as the county voters in 1962. Although earlier efforts at consolidation generally were supported by a broad array of civic and political leaders, the 1962 campaign for consolidation saw a split in the earlier (1958) coalition. Business leaders, the League of Women Voters, and the Tennessee Taxpayers Association supported the proposal while the mayor of Nashville and one of the city's major newspapers opposed it. The campaign for the consolidation argued mainly that the new government would be more efficient and economical, eliminate waste, and initiate long-range planning.

Special provisions were included to allay the fears of voters who feared increases in taxes. Prior to consolidation the city of Nashville's population was dropping. Since consolidation the population has grown 28%. In 1971 the mayor was quoted as saying: "Prior to consolidation, the business community was fed up. I believe there is a direct relation between Metro and the revitalization that downtown Nashville is experiencing ("Nashville Thrives... 1971, 133). However, in a public opinion poll taken in 1974 suburban residents generally indicated a greater sense of satisfaction with public services than citizens within the Metro government (Rogers and Lipsey 1974).

*Jacksonville.* After several failed attempts to consolidate the city of Jacksonville, Florida with Duval County a group of 55 civic and political leaders formed a coalition in 1965 to push for reform. Jacksonville was characterized by significant fragmentation of governmental structures, governmental duplications of services, and inefficiencies. The coalition for reform was vigorously opposed by a coalition composed of machine politicians, labor leaders, some suburban leaders, and some African-American leaders. Consolidation was criticized by some as a communist plot. The referendum passed on the heels of a highly publicized insurance scandal involving elected city officials who opposed consolidation.

While initially the new government experienced reductions in costs due to the elimination of duplications and also lower local taxes, in the long term those benefits disappeared. Nonetheless, there have been significant improvements in the equalization of utility rates throughout the region, a unification and upgrading of police and fire services, and a comprehensive ambulance rescue system. Recreational programs have been expanded, health services have been improved, roads were repaved, and there is a general feeling that Jacksonville is committed to creating a good business climate. To respond to concerns about the dilution of representation a system of neighborhood advisory committees was established. Perhaps the most significant change has been a shift in the governing regime from one dominated by an oligarchic *noblesse oblige* to one with a progressive conservatism ideology (Martin 1993).

*Indianapolis.* Prior to consolidation in 1970, Marion County had almost 57 local governments (22 cities and towns, 9 townships, 11 school districts, and 15 special-purpose districts). There was a widely held perception that local government was



inefficient. Beginning in 1947, a gradual process of consolidation took place including library services, a joint office building, county-wide planning and zoning, county-wide airport and parking facilities and a metropolitan thoroughfare authority. Inspired by the examples of Nashville and Jacksonville Mayor Richard Lugar formed a coalition of leaders from business, the African-American community, the League of Women Voters, and other community members to push for consolidation. Opposition came from some Democrats and minority leaders who feared a dilution of their political power and some suburbanites who had negative views of the city. Consolidation was achieved as a result of legislation of the state—voters in Marion County or the city of Indianapolis never voted on the issue.

The new government, Unigov, is credited with achieving substantial savings in insurance, legal services, purchasing, and trash collection (Willbern 1985). In addition, the government improved the infrastructure and physical services (adding new roads, constructing new swimming pools and playgrounds, removing abandoned cars, reducing crime, and adding low-income housing units). To a large extent the new government focused on rebuilding the downtown core and making Indianapolis a destination city. Finally, Unigov aggressively sought public-private partnerships and attracted considerable business investment into the city (Bloomquist and Parks 1995). On the down-side, the influence of African-Americans has been diluted as the Republican party has tended to control elections (Bloomquist and Parks 1995). While the city aggressively sought private investment the number of new projects over the first three decades was modest and in those cases the government paid at least half the initial cost (Gamrat and Haulk 2005). Although jobs have increased, a large portion of them are low paying and in the service sector (Rosentraub 2000).

*Louisville.* Louisville and Jefferson voted down consolidation referenda three times (1956, 1982, and 1983) before it finally passed in 2000. Previous unsuccessful attempts saw powerful coalitions of minorities, police unions leaders, volunteer fire departments and small-town mayors actively oppose the initiatives. The 2000 referendum passed by 56% after a vigorous year-long campaign which saw all major political leaders (Democrats and Republicans alike) support consolidation. One of the major issues was an appeal to civic pride, claiming that through consolidation Louisville would instantly

become a major city and would rival Lexington as the major metropolitan area in Kentucky. In addition, there were arguments that the new government would be more efficient and effective and would eliminate "squabbling" among local governments. Cost savings were never claimed to be a benefit of consolidation.

Small towns continued to operate as they did prior to consolidation while all public employees became employees of the new metropolitan government. Since its formation, Louisville Metro has focused on issues of land-use planning, beautification, and housing. Although a number of departments and agencies have been consolidated since the creation of the new government, squabbling over the distribution of resources continues. Where mergers occurred, costs have actually risen slightly because lower paid employees were brought up to the level of the highest paid employees.

While one wave of governmental reform pushed in the direction of consolidating local governments (in most instances eliminating city governments in favor of a county governmental structure) another form of government reform focuses on creating a type of federated local governmental structure. In these instances a new government that focuses on delivery of metropolitan-wide services is created while other local governments remain largely intact. These reforms took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

There are three examples of this form of modernization that will be briefly commented upon: Dade County, (FL), Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN), and Portland, (OR).

*Miami-Dade County, Florida.* Prior to consolidation Dade County had a commission form of government whereby the voters elected 39 different officers. There was a general feeling that the government was unable to do long-range planning, that it was inefficient, and that the government lacked accountability. In addition, the rapid expansion of the suburbs outpaced the ability of local governments to provide services. Efforts to consolidate the governments were defeated in 1945, 1948, and 1953 (by 908 votes) prior to passage by a narrow margin in 1957.

After several reforms—the most recent designed to increase minority representation—a board of 13 members elected from single-member districts was created to oversee the Metro government. Cities remain in existence. Service responsibilities provided by Metro include tax appraisals and collections, election services, care of regional parks, recreational and cultural facilities, civil defense, public health, mass

transit, environmental protection, water and sewer, traffic engineering, animal services, waste disposal, libraries, fire and emergency rescue services, low income housing, airports and seaports, and mental health services. Cities still provide police protection, zoning, and neighborhood parks and recreation programs. Municipalities may opt out of the arrangements (in all or in part) at any time.

Appraisals of Metro Dade are mixed. On the one hand Metro has been credited with successfully promoting a regional perspective on policy issues, making government more efficient, improving the metropolitan infrastructure, promoting economic growth, and improving better land-use planning and development (Mogulof 1972). On the other hand, local governmental leaders continue to be suspicious of Metro (Mogulof 1972), Metro fails to encompass the entire metropolitan area (Broward and Monroe counties are not included in Metro), the government has not produced strong political leadership (Sofen 1966), and there exists a feeling of despair within the African-American community that Metro Dade does not care about their plight (Croucher 1997).

*Minneapolis-St. Paul.* The Twin Cities area experienced rapid growth in the 1950s. As a result, many local governments were unable to adequately provide basic services such as sewer, waste disposal, transportation, and adequate housing. Environmental issues such as water pollution increased pressure for a regional-wide governmental unit. Building on a political culture that supported the positive use of government, local political leaders pressured the state legislature to create a regional government. Citizen organizations formed a coalition to obtain public support for the change and in 1967 the state legislature responded by creating the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council.

The Metropolitan Council is situated between the state government and local governments and possesses some of the powers of both. The Council members are appointed by the governor and reports to the state legislature. It has the power to raise money through taxation. The Council reviews all local proposals to ascertain their compatibility to regional needs, it develops long-term growth and economic development plans, and it reviews federal grant applications of local governments based upon regional interests. It conducts studies of air quality, parks and open spaces, water pollution, waste disposal, tax disparities, storm water drainage, consolidation of local government services, and land-planning.

Assessments of the effectiveness of the Metropolitan Council are mixed. In the early years after its creation it was credited with a number of impressive achievements: it injected a region-wide dimension into policies and services such as sewers, mass transportation, airports, housing, parks, and open spaces; it facilitated local intergovernmental dialogue on a wide range of issues; it improved service efficiencies; and it curbed urban sprawl (Harrigan and Johnson 1978). But in the 1980s and 1990s it has come under increasing criticism for failing to control the decision-making process with regard to a domed stadium, a race track, a velodrome, a basketball arena, the world's largest shopping mall, and several festival marketplaces. Its stature has eroded and it is seen as highly dependent on the support of the governor (Stephens and Wikstrom 2000).

*Portland, Oregon.* In the 1950s the Portland metropolitan area experienced a proliferation of single-purpose special districts. In an attempt to rationalize this governmental maze, the Portland Metropolitan Study Commission was created. Composed of business, political, and civic leaders it issued a report in 1969 recommending the establishment of the Metropolitan Service District with an appointed board of ten members to deal with land-use planning, sewage treatment, solid waste disposal, and drainage and flood control. The state created the MSD in 1970 and it gradually expanded its responsibilities to cover parks, the zoo, open-space preservation, water, library services and the operation of sports facilities. In the mid-1970s the regional government was further reformed by the state legislature and a new governmental structure, Metro, was created.

Metro began operations in 1979. It encompasses 24 cities and three counties and has a governing body directly elected by the voters. It is responsible for growth management, land use, and transportation planning and provides solid waste disposal services, manages the zoo, manages transportation services, and operates a regional tourism program. It derives its financing from a variety of sources including taxes and user fees. Still, a large number of local governments and single-purpose districts provide a large range of services.

Generally, Metro enjoys widespread public support (Dreier et al. 2001). It has successfully promoted the idea of regionalism and has been an avenue for the emergence of political leadership (Ehrenhalt 1997). Furthermore, Metro is credited with limiting

urban sprawl by establishing a metropolitan growth boundary that encourages more intense use of land. It is seen as a regional organization where regional issues can be openly discussed.

### **Consolidation Efforts: Lessons Learned**

While each consolidation effort is unique there are some common patterns that seem to emerge. In some instances these lessons will prove to be helpful for the Syracuse-Onondaga County consolidation effort; in other instances the uniqueness of the Syracuse area must be accommodated.

*Lesson #1: Consolidation movements take years before they are successful.* Most consolidation efforts took at least a decade before favorable votes were obtained, and in one instance (Louisville) over forty years elapsed between the time of the initial proposal and the time of the final positive approval. In almost all cases the voters rejected one or more attempts to consolidate before the final consolidation proposal passed. In only one instance (Indianapolis) did consolidation occur without a referendum. When referenda occur it is almost always required that a majority of voters approve in *both* the central city as well as in the affected suburbs.

*Lesson #2: An aggressive campaign is necessary.* Perhaps the best example of this is Louisville which spent \$1.2 million in a campaign that lasted over a year prior to the referendum. In most cities there were two campaigns: one to obtain approval from the state legislature to hold a referendum on the issue, and the second to campaign for public support.

*Lesson #3: A broad coalition of support is needed.* In all instances of success coalitions of support were created that were bi-partisan in nature and included union leaders, civic leaders, business leaders, and leaders of ethnic and minority groups. Former mayors were particularly prominent. Still, the movements for reform tend to be elite-driven, top-down reform movements.

*Lesson #4: Consolidation takes many forms.* While all the instances of reform cited above involve changes that moved toward a greater integration of governmental units, no common pattern of consolidation dominates. Instead, the exact form of consolidation is highly specific to the needs and possibilities of the particular metropolitan areas. (See

Appendix A for a list of the range of possibilities of integration of governmental units). The history of cooperation of any particular area must be recognized and taken into consideration.

*Lesson #5: Minority support is essential.* Because one of the most central and enduring problems in urban areas is the segregation of race and economics (Rusk 1995), it is essential that members of those minorities most highly segregated be included in the decision process at an early point. As David Rusk (1995) says: "The crisis requires exchanging the old politics of exclusion for a new politics of inclusion" (132). In those metropolitan areas where minorities were not included (e.g. Miami-Dade) attitudes of suspicion and despair occurred. It should be noted that other cities considering consolidation (most notably Cleveland) are concerned about the political and economic impact that reforms will have on minority populations. Civic leaders in Cleveland have recently commissioned a study to be conducted on that very issue.

*Lesson #6: State action is necessary but not sufficient.* In only two instances did the state government legislate consolidation without public approval. But in virtually all other instances state action was required to allow, at the very least, for referenda to occur on the issue.

*Lesson #7: Consolidation movements stimulate community discussions about fundamental community-wide concerns.* Although perhaps a short-term benefit, consolidation movements—whether successful or not—initiated lively discussions about fundamental community issues. Discussions about sprawl, land-use, representation, beautification and the like became part of the public dialogue during the campaigns and, in the cases where consolidation was approved, in the months following passage of the reforms as the communities struggled to work out the details. In many cases the discussions engaged substantial portions of the population on issues that previously were of interest only to a modest number of local elites.

*Lesson #8: Downtown revitalization.* The revitalization and rebuilding of downtowns have been directly linked to consolidated governments, especially when the downtown areas have a clear focus and links to the surrounding metropolitan areas. As one study of Indianapolis concludes: "if downtown revitalization is a goal for a region, a consolidated

governance structure can be an asset in terms of preparing, executing, and managing a plan that is endorsed by an appropriate constituency (Rosentraub 2000, 189).

*Lesson #9: The new governance system must have the necessary financial tools.* Not all reform efforts have met with overwhelming success. In virtually all instances where there were difficulties or where the new governments were unable to pursue projects they had hoped to be involved in, there were financial constraints. In some instances when the finances were not adequate the consolidated governments were unable to pursue programs that would have equalized services and programs.

*Lesson #10: Consolidation can control urban sprawl.* Fragmented governments lack the power needed to control sprawl. While the New Urbanism and the Smart growth movements have both developed visions (largely complementary) of how sprawl can be controlled, some sort of consolidated government is required to develop and enforce a regional plan (Meredith 2003).

*Lesson #11: Consolidation is not a magic bullet.* While consolidation can enhance the abilities of local governments to deal with land use planning, developing a sense of regionalism, rebuilding downtown areas, and, in some instances, providing services more efficiently, it will not solve all problems that afflict metropolitan areas. Problems such as attracting good paying jobs, eliminating poverty, and solving the problems of poor education remain beyond the scope of local government.

### **Does Governmental Structure Make a Difference?**

At the heart of any local government reform effort is the question of whether any particular governmental structure makes a difference in the life of the metropolitan area. As Paul Lewis (1996) puts it: "Do local and regional political institutions have any systematic role in shaping urban form and the 'built landscape'?" (1). There are two parts to this question. First, are the trends that are shaping our metropolitan environments beyond the abilities of local governments to control? Put another way, can the present problems in urban America—either in whole or in part, directly or indirectly—be attributed to present-day governmental structures? Second, could alternative (i.e., consolidated) governmental structures deal more effectively with the challenges that face urban America? Both of these questions are pursued in this section.

*What shapes metropolitan areas?* The dominant academic paradigm used to explain urban decision-making is regime theory. First introduced by Clarence Stone (1989) in his study of Atlanta, regime theory maintains that although politicians create electoral coalitions of voters and contributors to win elections, they must establish a different coalition to actually govern. Regimes are “informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions” (Stone 1989, 6). Extended most simplistically, regime theory downplays the significance of governmental structure and emphasizes the importance of local leadership as the key factor in determining the quality of urban life.

But what has been the success of regimes to solve urban problems? Whether they are liberal, progressive, or conservative in nature their ability to solve fundamental problems has not been good. One book on the subject draws this conclusion: “urban regimes developed symbolic responses to these problems, but none can claim significant success” (Dreier et al. 2001, 171).

While critical of Stone, another perspective taken to explain local decision-making is that ultimately local politicians make political decisions driven by their relationship to other politicians, voters, political activists, the demands of governmental policy, and the overall political culture of the area (Kraus 2000; Simpson 2001). For example, as Kraus notes in his study of Buffalo, even though outside forces were impinging upon decisions about Buffalo’s schools and low-income housing, and even though federal and state money came with strings attached, local Buffalo politicians still had significant leeway in making decisions. He finds that they consciously made decisions that further encouraged economic and racial segregation because it appealed to their short-term political interests. Once again, political leadership is an important factor, but, once again, fundamental urban problems were not solved.

Another perspective that has been taken is that the underlying forces that determine many metropolitan patterns are embedded in the free market system itself. People vote with their feet (or more appropriately their cars). Thus, urban sprawl, economic and racial segregation, and the quality of government services are products of the free marketplace. Put most boldly, “markets mean choice, and with choice comes sorting. People tend to choose to work, socialize, and live with others in their own social, religious, cultural, and



economic group. There's nothing wrong with that" (Rockwell 1994, 58). In this view, governmental policies and decisions (local, state, and national) are products of public choices (Tiebout 1956). This perspective accepts, rather matter-of-factly, the dysfunctionalities of the urban environment as mere by-products of the marketplace.

Finally, the federal government shapes metropolitan areas through public policies, both specifically directed at urban areas as well as indirect or implicit policies—policies that have profound impacts on urban areas but are not specifically targeted at them. Over the years federal policies in the areas of transportation, military spending, federal home ownership, tax deductions, federal fair housing, low income subsidized housing policies, and urban renewal have had the effect of promoting economic segregation and suburban sprawl (Dreier et al. 2001). At best, local politicians have only modest control over the policies and in some instances they have no influence in shaping the policies or in their implementation.

Each of the above paradigms that attempt to explain urban development reveal a common problem—the inability (or in some cases the lack of desire) of local politicians to address the fundamental problems that plague metropolitan areas. This inability to act to address issues of a *regional* nature can be traced to a number of issues directly related to government structure.

1. *Fragmented power.* There is a strong belief in localized government in the United States. This, coupled with the American mantra that “the government that governs least governs best” has tied the hand of politicians. Not only do local governments tend to be weak because of their internal structures, but they also have limited resources available to address problems not of their making (e.g., poverty, joblessness, segregation).

Even in metropolitan areas where politicians, civic leaders, and developers may have common objectives, decisions are often arrived at that undermine the overall quality of life for the entire area because they are filtered through fragmented power structures. When this is done, decision makers tend to support the interests of narrow constituencies at the expense of the entire metropolitan region. A patchwork of local political and economic interests develops (Lewis 1996).

The second aspect of the inability to consolidate political power in the metropolitan area is that local political leaders, already weak locally, have even less political influence

in attempting to influence urban policy at the state or national levels. Federal urban policy over the last 25 years has largely supported and encouraged suburban sprawl and has ignored the problems that afflict the central cities. As central cities have seen their revenues diminish, poverty and crime increase, and their populations decline they have also experienced a decline in their political power.

Yet, political power has not necessarily shifted to suburban political leaders. Although many state and national policies are designed to appeal to suburban residents (e.g., highway construction funding, tax breaks for home ownership) the policies have not developed as a result of organized political activity on the part of suburban political leaders, nor have they been specifically designed to shape urban environments (although they do exactly that). For that reason they are referred to as “stealth urban policies” (Ross and Levine 1996).

Adopting a more regional governmental structure will have implications for the creation of new bases of political power and may result in greater pressure being exerted on the state and national governments to explicitly address urban issues.

2. *Competition among local governments.* Local governments have tended to compete with each other for desirable populations and for businesses and economic development. The effects are functional for the more well-to-do suburbs and devastating for the central cities and for the total metropolitan area. “The competition among metropolitan jurisdictions to attract higher-income residents and exclude the less well-off has been a powerful factor promoting the concentration of poor people in central cities” (Dreier et al. 2001, 175). More than poverty alone, it is the concentration of poverty that produces dysfunctional behavior (e. g., property and violent crimes, drug abuse). Once perceptions start that neighborhoods are in decline, it tends to have a snowball effect and the middle class flee. Further, businesses and jobs follow the middle class to the suburbs (Orfield 1997).

Local government fragmentation helps to create an economic version of “the tragedy of the commons.” Originally conceived of by Garret Hardin (1968) in his discussion of environmental problems, the tragedy of the commons describes a scenario whereby the logical behavior for individuals (in this case local governments) results in a degradation of the commons (in this case the total metropolitan area). Thus, as local governments

compete with each other (rather than cooperate) for desirable populations, businesses, jobs, and green spaces, it produces concentrations of poverty and economic decay that results in an overall degradation of the metropolitan area. Urban expert David Rusk (1995) describes the dilemma well:

“Separate but equal” cannot work. It has never worked. Ghettos and barrios create and perpetuate an urban underclass. Bad communities defeat good programs. Successful clients of social programs typically move away. As a result, in inner cities, individual success does not translate into community success. Life in ghettos and barrios gets worse. Even with flourishing downtowns, inner cities decline. Inner-city neighborhoods deteriorate as places to raise families. With shrinking tax bases, city budgets are unable to meet rising social needs (127).

The health of metropolitan areas is not only dependent on a regional perspective, but also regional governmental structures that cooperate rather than compete with each other.

3. *No sense of regionalism.* With metropolitan governments fragmented local politicians attempt to hold on to whatever power they can. Since consolidation seems unrealistic (or at least too distant for most politicians) the tendency is to build localized “fiefdoms” and use what power can be amassed within those limited boundaries to address local issues. While this may work to the advantage of those areas that possess more resources (usually well-to-do suburbs) it further disadvantages inner cities and suburbs that lack resources.

Even consolidated governments that do not live up to their promise provide an arena where regional issues may be discussed in an open forum that includes representatives from all parts of the region. It is the hope that over time, a sense of regional identity will develop if it does not already exist.

### **Arguments for Government Consolidation**

Research of scholars and the experiences of cities that have been consolidated provide substantial evidence to construct an argument for consolidation in the Syracuse area. Many of the benefits attributed to consolidation will address the challenges in the central New York metropolitan area.

1. *Land use planning.* In metropolitan areas with fragmented governments a number of problems regarding land use tend to occur. Such metropolitan areas experience higher

degrees of urban sprawl than urban areas governed by regional governments (Lewis 1996). Urban sprawl results in a host of dysfunctionalities for metropolitan areas including the following:

- A concentration of poverty as those residents who possess the financial means flee neighborhoods where poverty exists (Dreier et al. 2001).
- Increasing segregation of the haves and the have nots.
- Low levels of civic and political participation (in the inner city as well as in the suburbs) as a result of economic segregation (Oliver 1999). (This point is elaborated on in greater detail below).
- Erosion of the downtown area. Consolidated governments have often focused their attention initially on revitalizing their downtown area and have been successful at doing so (Rosentraub 2000). Although downtown areas have sometimes seen renaissances without consolidations they have occurred as a result of a general improvement in the national and regional economies, not as a planned consequence of government action.
- Uneven service standards.
- No comprehensive green space plan.
- Inefficient and wasteful transportation systems that rely heavily upon the automobile and further encourage sprawl (Transportation... 1994).

All of the above arguments could be made with respect to the Syracuse metropolitan area.

It is important to understand that suburban areas are integrally linked to the central business districts. Studies consistently show that when central cities prosper so too do the suburban towns (see below for a more detailed discussion of the economic advantages of consolidation).

2. *Service efficiency.* Studies of the impact of consolidation on reducing the costs of services have been mixed (Feulner et al. 2005). In general, it is the case that in areas where there are a large number of single-purpose governmental units, consolidation can result in a reduction of costs (Feulner et al. 2005; Eberts and Gronberg 1988; Nelson 1987; Nelson 1986). The Syracuse-Onondaga county area contains 38 towns and cities, 18 school districts, and 25 fire and library districts, a relatively small number of units compared with some other metropolitan areas that are considering consolidation.

Consequently, service efficiency does not initially appear to be a strong argument for consolidation in the Syracuse-area, yet, it may be premature to rule out this argument until further studies have been undertaken. Although the Maxwell study (Feulner et al.

2005) did not find compelling evidence in the general literature for consolidation resulting in reduced service costs, their results were not only mixed, but, more importantly, the conclusions of the studies surveyed were not applied to the specific characteristics of the Syracuse area. If one wishes to pursue this line of argument a detailed and focused study that applies the variables found related to improvements in efficiencies with those characteristics in the Syracuse area will need to be undertaken.

3. *Economic competitiveness.* The evidence (although not compelling) suggests that cooperative regions are more likely to prosper than are areas where governments are fragmented and in competition for business. However, the key factor is not simply the size of government (Rosentraub 2000). Instead, economic growth occurs where central cities provide important functions for the surrounding region (Rusk 1995; Hill et al. 1995; Ihlanfeldt 1995; Pastor et al. 2000). But even then more is required.

An interesting line of argument revolves around the idea of industrial clusters. Industrial clusters are networks of businesses that are physically close to each other. Although some may compete with each other, more significantly, they share technical knowledge, a labor pool, and support services. Clusters tend to encourage business innovation, spur job growth, and result in a better quality of life for workers (Porter 1990). In some industries there is a need to interact frequently face-to-face with complementary workers, but business also benefits through informal interaction among workers (Anas et al. 1998).

In many instances these industrial clusters are composed of businesses that compete on a global level where innovation is essential for survival. Such an approach requires regional planning and coordination (Peirce 1993). To accomplish this, there must be clarity, accountability, and a clear public purpose with respect to government-business partnerships; something far more likely to occur with a regional form of government.

Still, the empirical evidence about the economic impact of consolidation remains suggestive and far from definitive. Although many studies argue that consolidation rationalizes the use of public and private resources, evidence is often anecdotal.

4. *Equity.* The spatial concentration of poverty is a constant concern among urban scholars. By segregating themselves in the suburbs, more affluent Americans can avoid the immediate problems associated with poverty, but this does nothing to alleviate the

persistent problems that poverty engenders. A host of the leading scholars on the subject are in agreement that a regional approach is the only solution to inner-city poverty (Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991; Downs 1994; Rusk 1995; Orfield 1997; Dreier et al. 2001).

It is important to focus on four specific policies in order to diminish racial and economic segregation (Rusk 1995):

- fair housing policies that will encourage low- and moderate-income housing in all jurisdictions of the metropolitan area;
- fair employment and fair housing policies to assure equal access to job and housing markets;
- a dispersal of low-income housing units that are supported by housing assistance;
- tax-sharing arrangements that will off-set disparities between the central city and the suburbs.

Where growth occurs in fragmented systems, politicians tend to pursue strategies of local maximization. What's more, the inequalities in neighborhoods intensify during periods of rapid growth (Hill 1974; Logan 1978; Danielson and Wolpert 1991; Weiher 1991). Thus, merely pursuing growth policies are not adequate to address questions of inequalities. There must be consistent regionally-oriented policies in place to deal with economic inequality.

5. *The ecological city.* Ecosystems do not respect political boundaries. Ecological systems are not only, by definition, interconnected, but those interconnections must be respected if the systems can function effectively. Development need not be inconsistent with maintenance of ecosystems, but for that to occur there must be an inventory of the ecosystems and there must be a comprehensive plan that can be enforced that respects them. Regional planning is essential to achieve those objectives (Poracsky and Houck 1994). Fragmented governments are unable to provide adequate protection for natural resources, especially riparian corridors and wild life habitats (Poracsky and Houck 1994).

The difficulties associated with cleaning Onondaga Lake highlight the limitations of our present governmental structures in dealing with environmental issues. Political accountability is undermined as local jurisdictions squabble over who is responsible for polluting the lake and who is responsible for cleaning it up and how that should be done. Concerned about the loss of businesses in their communities local governments allowed pollution of the lake to continue when it was obvious that the lake was being destroyed.

A consolidated government offers the possibility of not only dealing with environmental issues from a regional perspective but also of possessing enough power to enforce its decisions.

6. *Political and Civic Participation.* It is common knowledge that political and civic participation in the United States is related to social class (Verba et al. 1995). But few have examined the effects of locale on participation. One such study reveals that, controlling for class, participation is inversely related to economic segregation (Oliver 1999). Thus, the poor are even less likely to participate than they normally would be if they live in neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated, and the middle class are less likely to participate than other middle class if they also live in middle class neighborhoods. The reasoning is different for each group. For the poor, concentrated poverty leads to increasing levels of alienation and frustration as there is a realization that few resources exist locally to address their needs. For the more affluent, there are few conflicts to become involved in. It is precisely because there are no significant battles for limited resources that they have located in the more affluent neighborhoods

Conflicts over limited (but available) resources encourage political participation. Where it is possible to amass resources to direct them at addressing community needs, civic activity is more likely. Consolidation will have the effect of spreading out resources, thus making them more available to those who need them most and resulting in higher levels of political participation by increasing the political struggle over their distribution.

In addition, government fragmentation and the mobility of the population—both characteristics associated with sprawl—are associated with low levels of political participation (Dagger 1981). These characteristics associated with sprawl tend to undermine a sense of civic memory, thus undermining citizens' links to their local communities and making participation more difficult. Consolidated governments clarify lines of authority and responsibility and reduce the need to "flee to the suburbs" (Dagger 1981).

7. *Smart Growth.* Urban sprawl is inefficient, wasteful of natural resources, increases the cost of public infrastructures and the delivery of services, reduces the quality of urban life, undermines our health, and ultimately threatens the global environment (MacKenzie

et al. 1992; Office of Technology Assessment 1995; Meredith 2003; Muro and Puentes 2004). These concerns have spurred the “smart growth” movement which focuses on two land-use characteristics—compactness and density.

Smart growth does not reject growth. Instead, it attempts to control growth by limiting outward expansion, encouraging greater density development, encouraging mixed-use zoning, discouraging excessive use of the automobile, and preserving open spaces. In addition, it attempts to redevelop vacant or low density development in the already developed areas.

To achieve the goals of smart growth government must have the will and power to obtain extensive community input, collect and inventory land-use information, coordinate services and transportation networks, and develop and enforce a regional land-use plan. The present fragmented governmental structures are incapable of doing this.

8. *A Sense of Regionalism/Community.* Sprawl destroys a sense of community. By segregating urban populations sprawl discourages the social interaction of different groups of people, in effect undermining spontaneous “city life” (Frug 1996). Interactions that do occur tend to be safe, planned, and encourage the development of counterfeit communities rather than genuine communities (Freie 1998). Interactions are often planned rather than spontaneous, and tend to be with people one already knows, rather than with strangers. Consequently, it is difficult for metropolitan residents to get to know each other, let alone work together to solve regional problems.

A consolidated government offers the possibility of developing loyalties to the regional rather than to smaller governmental units. When regional loyalties take hold it becomes easier to build support for policies that will control sprawl and reduce economic and racial segregation.

9. *Metropolitan governments as lobbyists.* Presently there is no overt federal urban policy. Although many federal government policies certainly affect metropolitan areas (e.g., highway building, tax policy) to a large extent the federal government has left policy making for urban America up to the state and local governments. Yet, those governments often lack the economic and political resources needed to address their problems.



Local governments must be strengthened to not only be able to address local issues more effectively, but they must be strengthened so that there is a better opportunity of exerting influence at the state and national levels of government. America needs a federal urban policy, but it will only occur if it is demanded by local governments.

### **Arguments Against Consolidation**

Although it is not the focus of this report to dwell on the arguments that one might anticipate against consolidation, a number have been used to oppose consolidation attempts in other areas and some additional ones could be anticipated in the Syracuse area. Among those are the following:

- Local politicians in both the city and suburban towns will lose autonomy.
- The present urban patterns of growth are natural results of the free play of market forces and government should not interfere.
- Imposing limits and restrictions on growth will stifle economic development.
- Minorities will lose influence and their representation will be further diminished.
- Consolidation will produce more "big government" that is more of the problem than the solution.
- The new consolidated government will be dominated by suburban interests and the inner city will continue to deteriorate.
- The problems that face metropolitan areas today can be solved by new policies and more federal money directed to solving those problems. If that is done consolidation is not necessary.
- Consolidation will increase the costs of government and make it less responsive to constituents.

Arguments like these should be expected and responses should be planned. Available studies provide ample evidence to counter those criticisms.

### **Recommendations: Building a Movement**

There is no roadmap to building a movement for consolidation. The metropolitan areas that have been successful have followed somewhat different paths; yet, many who have followed similar paths have also been unsuccessful. Some suggestions for creating a movement for reform follow:

1. A broad-based movement is needed. Where reforms have been successful there has generally been a mobilization of civic and political leaders who, regardless of their own partisan identifications, have provided support for reform. In some instances (e.g.,

Louisville) national politicians who made it a policy not to get involved in local issues broke with their own policies to lend support. While it is not necessary for all leaders in local areas to be supportive of the reforms, a substantial number of local leaders who are willing to speak out are necessary.

2. Creation of an organization/movement. With only one exception (Indianapolis) the consolidations that occurred were the products of political struggle. Committees to study the issues were formed, discussions about the form of consolidation to be recommended were conducted, recommendations were drafted, redrafted, and agreed upon, and resources were mobilized to campaign for change. In some instances, the active campaigns lasted as much as a year prior to the actual decision being made.

3. Minority representation is crucial. It is important to include representatives from all minorities within the affected areas (whether they be economic, racial, or ethnic) in the organization and campaign for reform. It is important that those who presently occupy marginal positions in the community not be further marginalized either through exclusion in the campaign for reform or in the actual reform itself.

4. The issue of concentrated poverty should be addressed. Although in the actual campaigns for reform most movements downplayed this issue, urban scholars are in fairly broad agreement that it is an important argument in favor of consolidation. Yet, the actual results of the performance of consolidated governments are, at best, mixed. Scholars believe that this is one of the most important reasons to move toward consolidation, yet concerns arise that poverty is beyond the control of any local government to deal with. The theory seems better than the reality.

5. Efficiency arguments should probably be avoided. An early study that applies the specific findings of studies that have examined the efficiency arguments for consolidation to the Syracuse area should be conducted to see if they can be used here. If, as is suspected, they cannot be legitimately used, they should not become a part of the arguments marshaled in favor of reform.

6. The reform vote should be divided into the present political divisions. Depending upon the type of consolidation recommended, the actual vote of citizens for or against the suggested reform should be divided into at the very least, the city and the suburbs with the stipulation that passage would require a majority in both. Although referenda on

consolidations has killed a number of efforts at consolidation it seems unlikely that residents who accept and support a consolidated government that had not won voter approval.

7. State action is necessary. As is indicated in the Spitzer and Swiatek Memorandum (included in Feulner et al. 2005), depending on the form of consolidation pursued, the New York State legislature must either pass legislation that will allow for a vote on consolidation in the Syracuse area (consolidating the city with the county) or amend the New York State Constitution (in the case of creating a metropolitan "Supergovernment") to allow for reform to occur. While it is possible for the city of Syracuse and the county of Onondaga to approach the State and obtain favorable legislation to pursue a city/county consolidation, another strategy to be considered would be to find out if other upstate metropolitan areas are also discussing consolidation and, if so, working with representatives from those areas to press for state-wide legislation.

8. Don't over-promise. Although, on balance, the arguments in favor of government consolidation appear to outweigh those against it, consolidation will not solve or even begin to address all urban problems in the Syracuse metropolitan area. Arguments in favor of reform should be carefully reasoned and tempered with mixed experiences of other consolidations.

### **Recommendations: The Structure of Consolidation**

While it would be premature to suggest what particular form of consolidation should be pursued for the Syracuse metropolitan area (see Appendix), it is important that whatever the new governmental structure selected is given the necessary powers to solve the problems it is designed to address. It will be critical to maintain public support. That support will only exist if the new governmental structure is successful. It must be representative of all members of the metropolitan community, it must be a conduit for the development of leadership, it must be creative and visionary, and it must possess adequate financial resources. To maintain public support the new structure must produce demonstrable results.

## Appendix

### Regional Approaches to Governmental Cooperation/Consolidation

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#### Easiest to Achieve

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1. *Informal Cooperation.* Involves collaborative and reciprocal actions between two or more local jurisdictions, but usually does not require fiscal action. Probably the most common regional approach.
2. *Interlocal Service Contracts.* Voluntary formal agreements between two or more local governments. Used more by local governments in metropolitan areas than other areas.
3. *Joint Powers Agreements.* Agreements between two or more local governments to provide for the joint planning, financing, and delivery of a service to the residents of the jurisdictions involved. All states authorize such agreements.
4. *Extraterritorial Powers.* Thirty-five states permit some cities to exercise regulatory authority to a distance beyond their respective boundary. It does not apply to incorporated areas beyond their boundaries.
5. *Regional Councils/Councils of Government (COGs).* These are the approximately 530 voluntary councils of elected officials drawn from the local governments primarily in metropolitan areas. Their creation was stimulated by federal requirements for grants, most of which have subsequently been reduced or eliminated.
6. *Federally Encouraged Single-purpose Regional Bodies.* While over 1,000 of these were created in the 1970 and 1980, only a handful remain today because of federal budget cuts. They dealt primarily with economic development, aging, job training, and transportation.
7. *State Planning and Development Districts (SPDDs).* Established in the late 1960s and 1970s by states to bring together a variety of federal special-purpose regional programs. Only 43 remain today; they perform mostly a clearinghouse function for federal programs. Most are underfunded.
8. *Private Contracting.* Contracting with the private sector for service delivery is quite common. Most states authorize local governments to do so; many do.

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#### Middling

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9. *Local Special Districts.* In 1992 the Census listed 29,036 single-purpose districts, two-thirds with boundaries that are not coterminous with other local jurisdictions.

10. *Transfer of Functions*. This is a more permanent transfer of functions to another local unit of the state. Common in metropolitan areas.
11. *Annexation*. This was the most common method of aligning regional needs in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; still used today but most usually involve small areas. Voter approval in the annexed area is usually required.
12. *Regional Special Districts and Authorities*. These are usually area-wide governmental units that provide a single service such as water or sewer districts, hospitals, mass transit, etc.
13. *Metropolitan Multipurpose Districts*. Area-wide districts that provide more than one of the above type of services.
14. *The Reformed Urban County*. About three-fourths of the counties located within metropolitan areas have modernized their administrative structures and many provide supplementary urban-type services to their unincorporated areas.

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#### **Hardest**

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15. *Consolidated City-County*. The major city and the county government consolidate and the reorganized unit serves as both a county and municipal government. Small suburban municipalities, special districts, and school districts may or may not be included in the consolidation. Most of these consolidations have occurred since World War II.
16. *Two-Tier Restructuring*. This is the federative approach where area-wide functions are separated from more local interests. The best example is Miami-Dade County.
17. *Three-Tier Reforms*. There are only two examples of this form of restructuring—Minneapolis-St. Paul and Portland, Oregon.

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Adapted from G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, 2000. *Metropolitan Government and Governance*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 123-124.

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