

# APPENDIX

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**A Central Issues Special Town Hall Meeting: Can Consolidation Work?**  
**Friday, November 18 at 8PM on WCNY**

Tonight a special Central Issues town hall meeting. We're asking your opinion on consolidation of local government.

Dan Cummings      Good evening everybody I'm Dan Cummings along with George Kilpatrick tonight.

George Kilpatrick      Thank you Dan. After a year of studying the issue the Onondaga Citizens League is calling for a strategic consolidation of local government.

Dan Cummings      Joining us tonight to talk to us about this in some detail are first of all Larry Bousquet an attorney with Green & Seifter. He's the 2005 OCL study chair. Also with us tonight, Bob Doucette of Armory Development and Management. He's a member of the Syracuse 20/20 board. Bob took part in this study as did our other panelists tonight, Karen Kitney with the Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency

George Kilpatrick      In our studio we have over 30 people from the community and local governments. We'll also be taking your questions and comments so please give us a call when you feel the urge at 451-2414.

Dan Cummings      Now according to some officials Syracuse and Onondaga County are sliding into an economic ditch which would be too deep to climb out if we don't undergo some significant changes in the way that local governments operate. Well, Larry Bousquet, the group's finding indicates this process should begin immediately you say to come up with a strategic plan. Will you tell us about that?

Larry Bousquet      Yes, Dan, the impedes behind our study was really the fiscal crisis the looming fiscal crisis that faces local governments. With a shrinking and aging population, escalating state mandates, aging and expanding infrastructure, the pressures on the fiscal state of local governments could reach a crisis stage. The one thing that we've learned, especially from the experience of the City of Buffalo and Erie County is that you can't have a blue ribbon panel that meets behind closed doors that comes up with a consolidation plan and then attempts to impose it on the community. So we've had a very open process and it's really just the beginning of a process. I think that the most important revelation that has come out of our study is that consolidation is really just a tool. It's a strategy for addressing the significant issues facing our community or for addressing achieving goals for our community. And one of the things that has come out of our study is that there's really a consensus as to what the most important issue facing our community is. Whether it was from our public opinion poll, whether it was from the survey of elected officials, from the 12 public forums that we had, from our interviews with 22 community leaders, there was a resounding consensus that economic development, job growth, regional competitiveness was the number one issue facing our community.

Dan Cummings Well, Larry, thank you. Obviously thinking and reacting both regionally its correlated directly with economic growth and job creation. I guess the questions is, one of the questions we want to pose tonight. Can we develop a consensus on an economic development plan for this region with a buy-in from all the stakeholders? Is that one good way to put it?

Larry Bousquet That's one element for attacking the issue. I think the other element is looking at how we deal with the resources that we have within our community which really goes to land use planning. We have a very fragmented system for land use planning within the community which Karen would probably be the best to address that issue

Karen Kitney Well, land use planning depends on 35, excuse me 34 municipalities, one does not actually exercise any control over land use which have plans directed toward their own interest and what we do that I think is most at issue is the authority for land use decisions is completely separate from the responsibility to provide the highway network, the transportation facilities and the other infrastructures that support development. So while we are continuing to build and grow on the fringes of suburbia we are pulling resources away from what should go into maintenance and regrowth and regeneration in the center of our community.

Bob Doucette In response to your point about can we develop a consensus? I think that having everybody here tonight is such an important presence because really we have to be willing to try and undertake this conversation. I think that, and anybody here can correct me if I'm wrong but, I think the immediate reaction of many people. Particularly those who are familiar with government. The immediate reaction is -- this is too hard to do. This will never get done. It's an impossibility. And that is If that attitude prevails we will foreclose beginning discussion. And I think that that's the important thing is that people are willing to engage in a very, what is going to be, no matter what, a very difficult process.

Dan Cummings We have some veterans of local government in the front row here tonight. Joe Mareane can you stand up? Chief Fiscal Officer for Onondaga County. Is it. You've heard a lot of discussion over the years about government consolidation of services, regional economic planning. Is it too big a challenge to bite off?.

Joe Mareane No, I don't think so at all. In fact I think one of the finding this group may have arrived at is that there is probably more consensus in this community than we probably believe. I think there is a lot of good will. I read some of the survey results. I think there's an understanding that what's good for the city is good for the entire community. I think that's something we can all work with. It seems to me though that there are really two issues we're talking about here. One is economic development and a common plan to achieve our goals. The second is kind of a broader issue of governmental consolidation and I think it's really in that second area of governmental consolidation, that we really run into some issues, some difficulties in trying to pull some of those changes off. So, as we talk about these issues, I think there's really a two track discussion. One is that the common economic development, the second is a continued dialog about the need for consolidation in general.

Dan Cummings And the more important of those two tracks would be which? The regional economic development?

Joe Mareane Well, I'm not sure that one is more important than the other. I do think that there are significant opportunities for this community to do government differently in the future than they have in the past and I think we're talking about the development of our economy. We can't let government be a drag on that economy. We can't let inefficiencies in government in a way we've organized ourselves turn out to be a drag on that economy. We have to be as lean as the companies that in this economy if we're going to contribute to its growth. So I think it's really a two-track discussion.

Dan Cummings The reason I bring it up is because our panel might want to echo what we said a couple weeks ago on this program when we first started talking to you about consolidation. The fact that really we're not in this to save a lot of money. That if you got the governments to give up their turf there isn't a lot of money to be saved. Correct? By consolidating government.

Larry Bousquet One of the surprising things, I think its counter-intuitive, but one of the surprising things is that you look at consolidations, especially metropolitan governments around the country, costs savings really haven't been dramatic. But that doesn't mean that there aren't efficiencies and better service that come out of consolidations. And consolidation doesn't necessarily have to be a government consolidation. It can be a consolidation of planning. It can be a consolidation of services. So we aren't just talking about getting rid of a government. So you can have efficiencies and better service and you can attack the top line of government which is revenue rather than simply cutting expenses. So, you get to the same point that it isn't necessarily a cost saving issue.

George Kilpatrick We're here with Dale Sweetland. Dale, is there a consensus do you think within the county representing the chair of the county legislature? Is there a consensus?

Dale Sweetland We've had a lot of discussions privately among legislators about this issue and I can tell you I think legislators are very interested in this issue and one of the things that strikes me in addition to what Joe said, there was a state comptroller's report, I don't know, not long ago that talked about the spending of each government, each governmental level in Onondaga County. And if you looked at that report, and it included fire districts, villages, towns, the city and the county government, and collectively, those spending increases over the last 10 years are something that this economy could not sustain. It's just, the job growth and economy in this county would tell you that you cannot keep doing that. And so, I believe that we do a disservice to the citizens and ourselves of this county if we don't have the discussion, talk about the issue and try to come to some resolution. Whether it's consolidation of government or not something good, I believe, will come out of the discussion and I think we deserve it. I think we owe it to ourselves.

George Kilpatrick What do you think it's going to take to move this conversation forward?

Dale Sweetland I think it's going to take leaders in each governmental level who are willing to have the discussion and look at their constituents and say, you know what, change is not always bad. Let's not be so afraid of change and let's understand that everyone cares about the community as a whole and let's do something good.

George Kilpatrick We'll have more on that in just a moment. We want to get you involved in the conversation. Let's go to the phones 451-2414. Jim's in Fayetteville.

Jim Three points, the consolidation between the county and the city should have taken place a long time ago and yet for 10 years nobody's done anything about it. The common council guys don't want to lose their seats. County legislature doesn't want to lose their seats. That's really political but nobody, you'd think somebody would have some common sense and say, hey, we're going to survive, if we really want to we've got to really combine this county and city. Number two, the two biggest problems that the business industry have in New York State is workers' compensation and utility costs. Well, workers' compensation can probably be ironed out, but utility costs – we're being held captive by the people in London who own the whole network of Niagara Mohawk. So, you're going to go nowhere there. Number three, the Mitzpah Hotel, the Convention Center Hotel and Destiny. Reasonable, understanding grown ups should be able to iron that out, period. And for bringing in business I have no idea what the Metropolitan Development Agency has been doing for these last 20 years. Everybody's moving out, very few are moving in of any meaningful largeness.

Dan Cummings Thank you for your three points. The second one we won't deal with energy costs tonight directly, but does anyone of the panel think, he mentioned consolidating I think the legislatures perhaps. Losing their seats. I'm not sure if he really meant losing legislative seats and having one lawmaking body, but also just giving up turf between the city and the county. Larry, whether it's seats in the lawmaking body or the purchasing duties of each government?

Larry Bousquet Buffalo and Erie County looked at consolidation of the city into the county and it failed really because they were looking at it as number one a cost saving measure and second because they looked at the county as the fiscally responsible entity and just as it was coming in the forefront of the news, Erie County got hit with serious fiscal problems. So, consolidation of the city and the county isn't the only issue. It's really, why are you consolidating? What is the purpose? Is there really a consensus? Can we develop a consensus for using the tool of consolidation to attack the core problems. And the third issue we talked about really is at the core of it which is losing jobs. Regional competitiveness. How can we think more as a region and can we use consolidation as a tool to achieve that?

Dan Cummings Well, Bob Doucette also I think his point on that final point was if governments at both levels, county and city, towns and villages could get together and decide regionally that say Destiny was good for the area or that the Convention Center Hotel is good for the region. That this regional issue that we're talking about now might hold more sway regardless of how government was consolidated. Just people at all levels of government thinking as a region.

Bob  
Doucette            That's right. I think that one of the difficulties with the way we're structured right now is that people tend to see themselves within these little boxes and that's their frame of reference. And people have to begin to think out of those little boxes and think of ourselves as a whole and to begin to take into account other parts of that whole and what's good for the whole. And I think that's kind of a part of the current situation that consolidation could help take care of that kind of thinking. At least it will push it along a little bit.

George  
Kilpatrick            Alright, Bill Simmons is with the City of Syracuse Common Council Fifth District. Bill, what about this notice of consensus the caller mentioned Destiny USA as well?

Bill  
Simmons              Well, the main focus here is, that I picked up, is that we're talking about economic development. How can we consolidate services, move more efficiently, or come together regionally for long term planning. And I think that has been mentioned here also is that other models of consolidation in other metropolitan areas have not resulted in that much dollar savings. And so the point I wanted to make today is that when you look at economic development especially in Central New York and talk about the various economic development. There's always been high taxes, high utility costs and transportation. We've got an issue here in Syracuse. Some four years ago at Hancock Airport when we were losing ridership to other airports in Buffalo and Rochester and Albany because airfares were so high in Syracuse we ended up coming together, the city, the county, our federal representative, Jim Walsh, the MDA and a host of CEOs came together and pulled together their resources and some incentives to go out and recruit new airlines here in Syracuse. And as a result, we had Jet Blue, Trans Meridian and a number of airlines that resulted in lower fares and brought competition back. So there are examples and models of private sector and public sector coming together for the betterment of economic development in this community and for some of the other regional issues that people talk about.

George  
Kilpatrick            What would be one big, main barrier that you can identify here tonight that fails to build consensus within this community?

Bill  
Simmons              Well, when you talk about very often there's a great deal of talk about consolidation of services between city and county and purchasing in some little smaller departments and they did a great deal of debate as to how much real savings there would be. But, if you're going to look at consolidation on a city, county level you have to look at the bigger departments, the police departments, the public education, real operations and those are the kinds of things that there hasn't been a great deal of will to do. It was attempted between the City of Solvay and the City of Syracuse to consolidate the police department and most of the members in Solvay city government was voted out of office because everyone had their regional and local concerns that they want those kinds of services. So, when the caller calls in and says it's common sense and greater minds should prevail, we're also reflecting the will of the people when we talk about services and their local control over police and fire and public schools.

George  
Kilpatrick            Okay, we didn't get to Destiny. We'll do that another time.

Dan Cummings Before we get back to the panel, Vito Sciscioli could you stand up. He's the executive directory of 20/20 and he spent years and years in the City of Syracuse Government. Do you agree that there could be more success stories if Councilor Simmons is right that the airport has been a success in getting lower fares and so forth? If different agencies of government, different levels of government, county, city, towns and villages would cooperate more on a regional basis?

Vito Sciscioli Certainly with respect to what Karen Kitney was alluding to in looking at infrastructure in a regional way is a very important thing. In fact, we believe that clearly there's a mismatch. "We" being Syracuse 20/20. A mismatch between these kind of investments with respect to creating environment for economic growth, the airport being an example, but also issues such as environmental remediation with respect to Onondaga Lake are much better handled with a larger system of government. We can't find any evidence (20/20) in literature or experience that efficiency, accountability, participation of citizens or economic growth are directly and causally related to the structure of government.

Dan Cummings So you would recommend the move toward metropolitan government?

Vito Sciscioli No, in fact, just in some cases. I didn't say that. I said what we needed to talk about is where we have a mismatch of power with respect to how we make ourselves more competitive. And quite frankly, at the moment we have significant mismatches.

Dan Cummings Where do you see those mismatches?

Vito Sciscioli We are victimized by land use control and don't even mention it. And the fact of the matter is structures in government which then try to rationalize these things so we can become more competitive have to build a political movement where significant trust is built regarding how allocation of resources is administered and how it can benefit the entire community. We have battles all over that are generally characterized as fiscal battles. But really they're a lot about social equity.

Dan Cummings Give me an example.

Vito Sciscioli Well, Midland Avenue Sewage Treatment Plant. The question is certainly a county is much better positioned with respect to dealing with the cleanup of Onondaga Lake. They created great friction in the city as a consequence of it's impact on the local individuals who resided there. So the idea of advancing a larger system of government to remediate an environmental issue, a significant one that we must do in order to be a competitive place with a quality environment, caused conflict. There is a significant amount of distrust among the politicians involved at the ground level and it's not just a turf battle. It's about their advocacy for people who they believe have been aggrieved. Whether or not they've been aggrieved in this instance I think we've had a long debate on. But the fact of the matter is the trust doesn't exist. So a great deal of political work needs to be done regarding creating the environment, the political environment where

people will build the trust to start to talk about matching up the government structures to address the significant needs in this community. And we need to shape and influence metropolitan growth. We are not going to stop it but we need to influence and understand it. What is done in the city is concentrate poverty causing significant problems that we pay for. Whether we think we are or not. The fact of the matter is concentrated poverty causes significant social issues that result in a number of ways that we expend government expenditures particularly at the county level.

Dan Cummings for social services.

Vito Sciscioli For social services that we could do more about preventing if we could manage our growth more sensibly.

Dan Cummings Vito Sciscioli thank you. George?

George Kilpatrick Here with Randy Wolken, President of the Manufacturer's Association of Central New York. What is your perspective from the business community on what is happening in consolidation of local services and what the consensus or lack thereof is occurring here?

Randy Wolken We definitely need to think regionally. And I think that's the most important part of tonight's conversation both economically and as governments. And when we do that we'll be successful I think. Bill Simmons made a correct point. It's about collaborating, it's about working together, it's about getting real results. And when we guard turf and when we prevent ourselves from working together we make big mistakes. Businesses are leaving this community because of costs. If we could just control the growth in government it would be a significant impact on businesses. So I think the reality is we've got to work together. I know local organizations in general have to work closer together and that would be a successful idea.

George Kilpatrick Are businesses complaining about what they have to go through to get things done within their local government structure?

Randy Wolken Yes, they complain not just about costs but having to deal with multiple levels. How do we streamline that? If they can go to other places in the country and get with one entity it's much quicker. So we have to find a way even if they're not consolidated and I don't think consolidation is necessarily the key. We have to do joint work. Make it easier on businesses and residents to get solutions to their problems and get answers to their questions.

Dan Cummings Joe is on the phone. He wanted to make a quick question or comment about Destiny. Quickly Joe, okay? Syracuse, go ahead. Joe are you there? Joe? No Joe. How about Wade in Utica?

Wade Yes, I'm here.



Dan Cummings Hey Wade, go ahead. What do you want to tell this group?

Wade Well, I think that we should look at the larger portion of the pie. I think the taxes represent a smaller percentage. I think there's about \$5,000 of per household of insurance money going out.

Dan Cummings Insurance money.

Wade If we consolidated our insurance I think we'd be much further ahead than worrying about the smaller portion which is taxes.

Dan Cummings Alright Wade, thank you. I'm not sure whose insurance he wants to consolidate, but I know Tony Modafferi of Solvay wants to make a comment. Mayor?

Tony Modafferi Thank you Dan. Just going back to the councilor's comments on past failures of consolidation. Being from the Village of Solvay we went through a very trying time a few years ago and the reason for that wasn't because of the consolidation effort itself but how it was portrayed to the citizens of the village. And the key to this whole thing in my opinion is if you're going to move forward and try to consolidate I don't believe that by consolidating to build one larger metro-type government is the answer. I believe that the village government is probably the closest to the people of any government that we have here whether it be town, county or state. We're out there everyday talking with people. Alright? Usually anywhere from 2,500 to 6,200 people in the village. Okay? I guess the concern I have about this is if you as leaders and politicians we can't agree on what avenue to take how are we going to educate the people to get their cooperation to move forward? And I think that's a very important issue we have to dissect before we can actually get any large improvement on this issue.

Dan Cummings Anybody on the panel want to respond to that?

Larry Bousquet I think it's a very good point. It's clear that we like our local governments. We like home rule. But the question is if you're not talking about political consolidation of a village into a town, is the village or the town willing to give up land use control for regionally significant project so that you don't have to go through multiple levels of government. So you don't have towns competing with towns and towns competing with the city. So, there's still a give up of power. There's still turf issues and how can you move? Even if you keep the political entities in place, how can you move those regional decisions to a different level that helps with economic development? I guess I'm throwing that back to you. I mean, there are a lot of people here from the towns and villages. Is their willingness to move forward towards regional decision making

Dan Cummings Well, Hank Chapman's here. As long as you brought it up, let's bring up Hank Chapman, Supervisor on the Town of Manlius. What do you think?

Hank You know I think in my mind the biggest obstacle to consolidation are governmental

Chapman leaders. I think that if you look out to the public and you talk to the people there's a consensus out there that there needs to be some sort of consolidation and there needs to be a consolidation of services. There are many, many opportunities out there to do it. Councilor Simmons was talking about failed consolidation. There's been successful consolidation. In 1985, before my time, we took three village police departments and consolidated into one town police department. Service is great. Cost is down. It's been very, very successful. I think the people out there, everyone would tell you, a consensus of the people in the community that there's too much government in New York State. Too many levels of government and the biggest obstacle to it are the governmental leaders and I think everybody has to recognize that and be willing to take tough stands and look. There's 34 municipalities, 36 I guess including the county and the city and there are many, many opportunities to work together whether it's consolidation of levels of government or just consolidation of services where we can save money and we can operate more efficiently and I think we all need to take this has been how many different studies talking about consolidation. Different groups talking about it. We need to take this as a springboard and really make it happen.

George Kilpatrick David Panasci probably agrees, he's with DHP Consulting. You have concerns about fragmentation as well.

David Panasci Well, my concerns are tied into what everyone has kept saying is one of the most important elements and that is economic development. And the first caller mentioned the MDA and what I see and if you go to the Onondaga County website. There are a number of agencies that are dedicated to helping economic development. But, pity the poor business person looking to come to Central New York. He wouldn't even know where to turn. And I think we need to put an end to that fragmentation as well as the fragmentation that is in the government sector as well.

George Kilpatrick David thank you. Joe, in Syracuse, you have a comment or question?

Joe Sure, I apologize initially, my battery went dead. My question is this regarding Destiny and economics. If Destiny acquires land like with decisions such as Kilo v. New London. And they actually acquire the land in the name of energy. And seeing that nuclear energy is the most viable right now, form of energy, is it possible for them to build a reactor on that site?

Dan Cummings Wow. I don't know if there's anybody here that take that. Let's hope not. Among the grand dream, I don't think that's one of them. Listen, we want to get to another point that Vito Sciscioli from 20/20 brought up and that I think probably the Mayor of Marcellus could address. That is sprawl. The continued movement of population and infrastructure outward from the city center. Especially when the costly parts of social services are in the city. Where people are concentrated in poverty. Is there a way, do you think Mayor Eisenberg for this county, this region to develop a plan that would think regionally countywide so that we can prevent some of the land use problems that promote the sprawl even if it should benefit Marcellus once in a awhile.

Mayor Fred Well, I think there are ways in the Village of Marcellus and the Town of Marcellus we

Eisenberg haven't really had that much sprawl. We have too many hills so you can't get sewers and water as quickly as you can in other directions that are flatter. So, we haven't seen that. We've seen some new home development, which is I think good for our community. I just want to comment on a couple other things. One of the things about the airport, I think they did an outstanding job getting some low priced carriers in, but on the other side, the Hancock Airport Authority now makes that airport one of the most expensive airports or companies.

Dan Cummings There is no authority yet. What do you mean authority?

Mayor Fred Eisenberg The authority that runs that.

Dan Cummings It's still the City of Syracuse. They'd like to make it an authority.

Mayor Fred Eisenberg But everybody gets tax money from it and now it's the most expensive for air carriers to fly into the city. It has been forever.

Dan Cummings Can the committee address that? Is that the point you want to make about aviation and the airport.

Mayor Fred Eisenberg No, that's just one. But my real comment is I think the towns and villages have done a lot of consolidation. They've consolidated justice departments, our DPWs work together. We come to conclusions on projects that in our areas. I think the county and the city are the ones that need to work together. I think the comment about the, you know, one wants a new hotel, one wants the old hotel, how they both look at Destiny and so on. Slow down some of the things that decisions need to be made and we need to move on.

Dan Cummings Well, I don't think anybody disagrees with you. Who on the panel wants to take that because when we talked on this program two weeks ago we all talked about leadership and maybe we need new political leadership at the executive level to force these issues to the front burner so there isn't just five or 10 more years of talking about it. And granted it may take more than the new charismatic chief executive of the county or the city or some legislative leaders to say let's force it. But without political will led by some elected political leader how does what Mayor Eisenberg talks about ever hope to get accomplished.

Bob Doucette It doesn't. I think that there is no substitute for political leadership and I think that Dale Sweetland spoke to that a little bit earlier. And let me say this as well. That part of what is going to be taking place is for us to focus and for the leaders to be able to focus on these issues and to try and understand them because they're not easy issues to understand first of all. And I think that's the first step of having that leadership take the roll that they are eventually going to have to take. And in line with what we started out talking about I want to address the gentlemen from Solvay regarding the relationship between villages and their constituents which is so important. But we have to somehow balance that against what is, what is becoming a burning need of this region

to do something about the current situation. We wouldn't be talking about consolidation if everything here was hunky dory. Everything isn't hunky dory. We're heading in the wrong direction. We've been headed in the wrong direction for a long time for a lot of different reasons. And no one on this panel and this study will not tell you that consolidation is a silver bullet that's going to cure these problems. It's not. It's going to tell you hopefully that it's a tool. A necessary tool to try to solve some of these issues. But as we continue to lose population, the need to deliver services, basic services, is not going to go away. Our ability to provide for those services is going to become greatly diminished for every tax payer that leaves this county. That's something that we need to keep coming back to.

Larry Bousquet I think there's one very hopeful point that came out of our surveys of elected officials and came out of the public opinion poll. That is that there's an overwhelming consensus that the health of the city is important to the people of this region. And it didn't make any difference whether it was the citizens of the City of Syracuse or the Citizens of Onondaga County outside of the city or whether it was our elected officials in the city or the county. Over 80% agreed that the health of the city is vital to the region. So there is a public will out there. Whether there is a political will to deal with it, that's the issue.

Dan Cummings George's got Dale Sweetland again with him. You've got a chief executive in the city right now who is standing up very strong for the city. And you also heard Vito Sciscioli talk about it. About how if city interests are to be protected that there has to be a strong leader that says what you just said. That the city matters and you can't let suburban or other interests pull away from that urban core and do planning and do government activities, perhaps Dale, that are counterproductive to that urban core.

Dale Sweetland I just want to make a comment that it doesn't matter what level of government folks are elected to but where they live. We all think, each one of us. Everyone in this county. We think we live in the best area in Central New York. We think the town the villages we live in is the best place and we think that that's more important than any other place. So when you get elected to a town board or you get elected to a village board or you're the mayor or the town supervisor or the city or even county government, people let you know what they think is important to them. And my point is that as far as the, it doesn't matter to me anyway where that next business locates in Onondaga County to bring jobs to the people of this county because we're pretty mobile. Then once they get there, wherever they are, then it's our job I think to make sure that people who need transportation to get to the job have transportation to get to the job so that they can be employed.

George Kilpatrick But, Dale, as the chair of the county legislature, should you be concerned about further concentration of poverty and a land use plan that makes sense to avoid that.

Dale Sweetland Sure, we talk a lot about in the County legislature about having to extend sewer lines and water lines. We're the ones that do that. You know, the metropolitan water board is a department of county government and then there are water departments in each of the municipalities and the sewer system is pretty much our system and the water environment protection area. County government is the county government. You

know one of the points I did want to make I just thought of George is that there have been consolidations and there were some things that were never never needed to be consolidated because they always existed the way they do today. I don't think there's anyone crying out in this county that each town should have a district attorney. I don't think that there's anyone crying out in this county that the county clerk's function of keeping property records and deeds needs to be diversified and spread into the towns and villages. And so I contend it's mostly fear. It's mostly a fear that says, gosh, what could it do to me? And I just contend if we lay the groundwork we educate ourselves and we educate the public. And we tell folks don't be so fearful of this. I think we can do good things. Maybe we don't get to metropolitan government and I don't care that that's not what we do. But we can do good things and we can make things better.

Dan Cummings Scott McClurg is with the Homebuilder's Association.

Scott McClurg Yes, thanks Dan. I think one of the issues that I think Jim from Liverpool brought up is very astute. The cost of the workmen's comp and the cost of the health insurance. I was at a seminar put on out at Savannah Dole by the Syracuse Chamber and they said that the highest taxes in the United States, not in New York State, but in the United States were in this county. And you know, I don't want to be known for that. It's a great spot. But I don't want to be known for the highest taxes in the United States. The bottom edge is like with a homebuilder and I'm a contractor. I have 33 employees and my insurance costs have gone up 30 to 60% a year compounded over the past five to six years and that just makes it almost impossible.

Dan Cummings Workers' comp.

Scott McClurg Workers' comp, yes, and insurance in general.

Dan Cummings The reason why your point is well taken, I blew it off earlier perhaps, but we talked about it before. That there's got to be a state-wide push with this too. Didn't we talk about that? That's not going to be solved by local government consolidation. But if New York State was interested as in some smaller states, where they have consolidation.

Scott McClurg But Dan, as a tax paying businessman the problem is that the Chuck and his truck as we call it in the industry. The guy without insurance, the guy without workmens' comp, the guy without anything is going to be half my cost. And that cash type business is going to thrive. And the true businessman is going to not survive. Mark Bitz,

Dan Cummings Plainville Farms.

Scott McClurg Plainville Farms. Moving one state to the west, one state to the south, in one year his bottom line will increase by \$600,000 for one year. I mean the last one out turn off the lights. I love it here. We want to keep it here by all means. But, the bottom edge, things have got to drastically change

Dan Cummings Would someone on the panel like to address whether or not this needs state-wide push? Because we talked two weeks ago about Oregon I think and Maine. Some smaller very different states than ours being able to have a system where they encouraged metropolitan government and they had a state-wide land use plan that really got everybody together. Karen?

Karen Kitney I think Oregon did an excellent job of getting communities to think regionally and they did it 20 years ago and you can see the difference on the ground in their cities. And I think if we all step back a little bit like Dale said we don't just live where we put our heads down at night. We live in the towns we drive through and the villages we get our coffee in the morning in and where our job is. All different communities. And we need to figure out which of those areas of governmental decision making belong at that local level and which really belong at a regional level. We've got a good track record in this county of moving things to the regional level and I think we can do better.

George Kilpatrick Julia Mowers on the OCL Study Committee and on the Syracuse 20/20 Board. You just got back from one community that did do this successfully. What happened where you were?

Julia Mower I've just come back from Louisville, Kentucky. And let me tell you that is a community that is excited about what it has accomplished. Thinking about just the possibilities. Thinking about scale and speed that they've been able to achieve by moving from the 67<sup>th</sup> largest city in the country to the 16<sup>th</sup>. Being in the top twenty has made a tremendous difference and it's opened up all kinds of possibilities for them. Among the accomplishments that they are now speaking about. Ten million dollars in savings in one year. Lots of young people now moving back to a city that has become so much more exciting than the place that they left. A whole influx of new and exciting great talent into government jobs wanting to be part of this new adventure. Including lots of dollar-a-year volunteers. They only won by a 53% majority, however now it seems as though everybody is celebrating what has been accomplished through this very unique, and I say unique because the last time it happened was in the late 70s. So it's been quite a dry spell since there was another city/county consolidation in Indianapolis. I could go into more details but we are going to be getting quite an extensive report that we can look at and mine all kinds of good value from. But let me just say one sound bite that Deputy Mayor Joan Riehm said in one of the small work groups that was in. Two-thirds of what they have been able to achieve they could have done without the merger. It wasn't so much about restructuring the government. It was about reshaping the attitudes that really has made that region come alive. And there's a lot we can emulate there.

George Kilpatrick Were there a lot of the similar type discussions that you hear here tonight going on for there years and years and years before they were able to get to this point?

Julia Mower Three decade process, two failed attempts before, but the things that they cited as what were their motivators are exactly what we are experiencing. The simple message that they put out over their television airwaves was simply that, don't you want your kids to come back here and find good jobs? Their messages were the same as the messages we'd like to be able to say. The issues that they were dealing with were pretty much like ours. Not so much decline as really just a stagnation, a feeling of malaise, a disappointment, a frustration, warring turf battles between small governments. They kept all of their small governments by the way because for many, many things government ought to be close to the people. But I think that's been said here in a number of ways. For certain aspects of what has to go on in this competitive era where it's regions and not units within them that really matter you have to have one level at least of decision making that is all encompassing and takes in what is good for everybody in the particular locality that makes up that region. But, there will be more because I'll be getting a CD. I'll be able to spread that around the community and it will belong to everybody. They are very giving there. They do want to help us. That was the conference of The Alliance for Regional Stewardship. That's a new national group for whom teaching communities to think regionally is their central mission.

Dan Cummings While we wait for Judy's CD let me see what the CPA has to say. We have an opinion from the certified public accountant by the name of Dave Moynihan. Dave?

Dave Moynihan Well, everyone needs an accountant to throw a wet blanket on the discussion but I'd like to follow up. You said where does the will come from? Where does the political capital come from to get this started? I think if we don't get the political capital, the fiscal reality will solve the problem for us.

Dan Cummings Meaning?

Dave Moynihan Meaning if you look at the City of Syracuse on June 30, 2004 it's structural imbalance is it's about \$69 million in the hole and it's ability to pay it's long term obligations versus the assets it has at hand. The county has about \$8 million worth of surplus which represents about 1% of it's revenue and you can see that that would not take long to

Dan Cummings What do you recommend Dave?

Dave Moynihan Well, something has to change because quite honestly government is going broke. And

Dan Cummings What's your solution?

Dave Moynihan My solution is you generate about 55% of your revenue to operate between sales taxes and property taxes and they have been absolutely stagnant over the last 10 years at both the county and the city except for rate increases and property tax increases. Property tax increases are incredible regressive. It only moves things backward.

Dan Cummings I'll agree. What's your solution?

Day Moynihan The solution is you have to find a way to promote economic growth. You will only survive, the governments in this area will only survive if they can find a way to drive economic growth.

Dan Cummings Good point. But before, can I just jump in and have both Stephanie Miner and Joe Mareane stand back up to quick responses to those. Because he's right. Stephanie Miner is the chair of the financial committee on the Syracuse Common Council and we've already met Joe Mareane. Is he right about the fiscal reality is going to drive this home eventually.

Stephanie Miner Well, I think he is absolutely right. But I think we have to look at context when we start talking about this question. When you talk about economic development I think that you will have privately and hopefully it's getting more publicly in agreement among everybody in this community that the way we approach economic development doesn't work. Now, I would pose that the reason that is because if you go to the north Oswego is not doing better, if you go to the south, Cortland County's not doing better. Monroe County is not doing better, certainly Oneida County is not doing better. This is a state issue. The things that Scott talked about as a businessman, utility costs, workers' comp costs, health care issues. Those are things that are going to have to be solved at a state-wide level certainly because when people can go to Scranton, Pennsylvania instead of Syracuse and cut their fixed costs by a third or two-thirds, that's an easy decision for a businessman. And so when we have an agreement in this community that we need to do something about economic development I think we would be foolish if we were pose it to people, look if you consolidate governments everything's going to be fine because we're going to free up enough capital, which we've already heard is not the case, to make everything go away. That's not the case. And we need to say to people look we have state-wide regional issues of competitiveness that have to be addressed. But on top of that we can say, yes, regionally it makes sense to have one table full of people to make some decisions about land use and other things. But again, there's another important factor that I think needs to be addressed. And Joe and I end up going to a lot of these panels and sit next to each other and talk about that. And that is that there are fundamental disagreements sometimes about what is in the best interest of the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County of the Town of Marcellus. You know, people from Fayetteville say, hey, look, or the caller said from Fayetteville, you know, Destiny, that's easy, how come you guys haven't gotten over it and moved on. Well it's not easy. And when you're asking the City of Syracuse to give up 30 years of property taxes, that's a very difficult decision that requires scrutiny and that requires us to think about it. Now, perhaps for the man in Fayetteville it's not that big a decision because you know what? His kids aren't going to be effected by a lack of \$11 million per year for 30 years going into that school district. That's what we're looking at. So there are issues, but what has happened and then I'll let Joe do his response. What has happened is that we have such a vacuum of economic development in this community that we have let certain people come in and dominate the headlines. Instead of saying, you know what? We need to address utility costs, we need to address property taxes and we need to look at those



things both at a state-wide and a regional level and then find out where we do have agreements across government and move forward there. And I think there is that opportunity as you can see we all agree that it's not working.

Dan Cummings Thank you councilor. Joe?

Joe Mareane I agree with a lot of what Stephanie talked about in terms of the disincentives that exist in New York State and the state has to step up and take responsibility for some of that. But because of those disincentives, economic development is even more important on the local level. There are things government has to do to offset those disincentives. We're finding out today. Pick up a newspaper, what happens when we're not all pulling our oars in the same direction? At best, we're going in circles. At worse, we're just at a standstill. So I think that's really what we're talking about today in terms of economic development. In terms of the fiscal situation, Dave's right. It's is gloomy and the situation isn't getting better. It's getting worse. I would suggest that we look not so much at the direct services we provide. I mean it takes so many snowplows to plow so many streets. But, like a good company, let's look at our overhead costs. For every road crew in every village and town and city and county there's somebody who does payroll, there's somebody who manages those trucks, there's somebody that buys those trucks them self, there's somebody who manages the operations. There's a significant overhead factor. I think that's why we're looking at consolidation. That's why we talked about purchase. What can we do that won't effect the quality or type of service that's on the street that would cut the overhead. And I think there are lots of opportunities like purchase and IT and accounting and so forth that we ought to be looking at.

George Kilpatrick Alright, Joe Rossi. Joe, what did you want to say about all this?

Joe Rossi Well, my question is we have now acknowledged the issue. We talked about solutions. How are we going to implement those solutions? My question is, is this something that can be done by voter referendum? I mean you talk about political leadership taking the bull by the horn but sometimes you've got to go to the voters. Have you researched that?

Dan Cummings Panel?

Karen Kitney You do in New York State. You do have to have what's know as a triple referendum to move one function from one level of government to another. It's very difficult to accomplish. You have to have a majority of the voters in the city, a majority of the voters in the towns, and a majority as a whole which makes it very difficult to achieve any progress.

Larry Bousquet It doesn't mean that you can't achieve the great bulk of what we're talking about by inter-governmental agreements though. And that can be a starting point. Sometimes you have to start talking before you can cooperate and you have to start cooperating

before you can work together so there needs to be a starting point. But if you were going to end up with a metropolitan government. It's a very arduous process under the New York Constitution and we have addressed that and will address that in our report.

Dan Cummings Well, Lance Donough is with us. Retired Deputy City Fire Chief, right in Syracuse, Lance? You were aware of a particular functional consolidation that did work.

Lance Donough This actually started four years ago when Mayor Driscoll directed Chief Cowin to look into bringing the Syracuse Airport Crash and Rescue Unit into the Syracuse Fire Department and that was a very cumbersome operation that took over a year to accomplish simply because even though the two organizations were both under the jurisdiction of the City of Syracuse and subject to direction by the Mayor, it involved levels of government all the way from the federal level down to the city. The state was involved, the county was involved and the FAA and the FCC so. It's very complicated. We knew from the outset that it wouldn't save any money. But we did ultimately achieve it and we think we really provide a better service both to the city taxpayers and to the travelers at the Syracuse Airport. And it can be done but it's very hard work. And I'd like to commend everybody for looking into that and promoting it because we really need more of it.

Dan Cummings Alright, go ahead Bob.

Bob Doucette I just want to speak briefly about this issue of the state and the role of the state and how important these issues are at the state level. They're incredibly important. Stephanie Miner is correct. However, I cannot help by believe that we could not have a greater impact upon our state leaders and state decision making if we acted with a single voice. That part of our difficulty is that the state has the luxury in some cases politically of playing off one entity against another entity and that I cannot believe that we would not be more powerful and a more powerful voice if we were unified and that we spoke with one voice and went to the leadership and demanded change at the state level.

Dan Cummings Bob DeMore, Supervisor, Town of Fabius.

Bob DeMore Thank you. On the point of shares services as an example. A small town like Fabius we share an ambulance services with five towns in Madison-Cortland-Onondaga County and this year our budget is about \$22,000. If we had our own ambulance service it would be over \$200,000. We promoted a trash district in our area that comprises four towns and two villages. We save our residents about \$400,000 a year. The towns and the villages are looking at a grant now to promote more shared services as a way of really saving people money.

Dan Cummings That's great. Thank you Bob.

George Kilpatrick Mark Stanczyk you have a unique position. You represent the county in the city. What do you think about this whole conversation about consolidation, consensus, sprawl, concern for the city core?

Mark Stanczyk Well it goes back to what I think Vito said at the beginning of the show. There's a trust factor that we have to get to. I mean when people leave the area they go on vacation and people ask where they're from, they're not from Manlius, they're not from Fayetteville, they're from Syracuse. And somehow we've got to get to the point where everybody here no matter if you represent Minoa, you represent Skaneateles, you're from Syracuse. And what happens in the city is our problem, our concern and what good happens in the city is our joy and we've got to get to that.

George Kilpatrick Is that a conversation that your colleagues share with you?

Mark Stanczyk Sometimes.

George Kilpatrick Sometimes?

Mark Stanczyk Sometimes and sometimes not. Because sometimes there's parochial issues. So that gets in the way.

Dan Cummings Panel? Bob?

Bob Doucette Speaking to Judy Mower who I think her point is very relevant here. Louisville made a decision. Louisville made a decision that they wanted and knew they had to. There was a larger stage they had to play to. We are as a region are competing with regions across this country. You can fight all you want in Onondaga County and between the villages and whatever you want to do but there's a bigger world out there. Louisville recognized that and moved forward to do what they thought and I think found out they needed to do.

Dan Cummings Karen?

Karen Kitney I would go beyond that and say we need to collaborate with all the upstate metropolitan counties if not all of the counties in upstate because upstate rises or falls as a group, not as Syracuse, Buffalo, Rochester or Binghamton.

Dan Cummings Well, until that day comes, there's no reason not to start it small and local. Like the Fabius ambulance savings perhaps. Or do you have to have a master plan before you start?

Bob Doucette There's no reason not to save money.

Dan Cummings      Larry? A parting comment from you as study chair?

Larry Bousquet      It seems that there's a consensus on the issue of economic development and land use is a big part of that. I think there's also an issue on how vital the City of Syracuse is to this region. So it's our hope that our study will be a start of a process not the end of a process.

Dan Cummings      What will the next step be? What should the next step be after tonight? What does the OCL recommend?

Larry Bousquet      I'm going to turn to Bob of 20/20.

Bob Doucette      You know as part of 20/20 we've been working on this issue along with Larry since he began the study and we just hope to use the study to advance the, again, advance this conversation. And we'll be trying to outline some program that we will have a conversation across this county regarding this topic.

Larry Bousquet      I would say that we turn it back to the political leaders because so many times there's a disconnect between the community groups and the political leadership and for a process that really involves government to work it has to start with political leadership. And one of things that our discussions with leaders showed was that this isn't really on the top of the agenda so I would turn it back to the leaders.

Dan Cummings      Well, maybe this program will help get it toward the top of the agenda. Larry Bousquet, Bob Doucette, Karen Kitney I want to thank all of you and everybody who joined us tonight and from my colleague George Kilpatrick here at WCNY. Thank you for watching. Make sure you keep this issue at the top of your agenda. Goodnight everybody.