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DCTA UPDATE FOR JANUARY 2011

By Mark Hazelbaker, DCTA Legal counsel

DCTA seeks RTA restructuring, not dissolution.

The Towns Association Board voted Wednesday, December 15, 2010, to contact the County Executive and others to request restructuring of the Regional Transit Authority. We did so by letter. The Association has been concerned, since the RTA was formed, that it has no Town representation on its governing body. We have heard from some people in response to the letter that they took it as a sign we support efforts to dissolve the RTA. This is emphatically not the case.

In point of fact, there are other interest groups out there who do want to dissolve the RTA. There also is unquestionably sentiment in the new legislature to undo any legislation adopted in the recent past which allows local option taxes. The DCTA does not support either position at this time.

We believe that a regional approach to transportation is important. However, the Association has been dismayed by the focus of the Dane County Regional Transit Authority on commuter rail. We do not believe that commuter rail is the best answer to future transportation needs in the County. We also emphatically demand that any new taxes to support regional transportation initiatives be placed before the electorate for approval by a referendum. This is not a hypocritical position on the part of Towns. Towns have to win the support of the electorate for practically every major action we undertake, including the annual levy, borrowing and purchase of real estate.

It would be unfortunate if the opposition to the commuter rail proposal or the half-cent sales tax went so far as to destroy any opportunity to work proactively on a realistic transportation program. We think that Dane County has seriously failed to address transportation needs that address how people actually get around in the County. We need to expand bus service, but we also need to address the roads that buses and the vast majority of trips use.

A reiteration: the DCTA does not endorse candidates.

We will repeat this message several times during the pending campaign season because it is important. The Dane County Towns Association does not endorse candidates. The Dane County Towns Association does not support any of the persons either currently in the race for Dane County Executive or thinking about getting into the race. Individual officers, directors, Town officials or others are free to endorse in the individual capacities. However, the Association does not authorize any candidate to list either the Association's name or official position of any DCTA official in support of their campaign. If a candidate says that they have the support of Jerry Derr as "DCTA President" they are claiming that without authorization either from the Association or Mr. Derr. The same is true for Mark Hazelbaker, as DCTA Legal Counsel, Renee Lauber, as DCTA Land Use Consultant, Julie Gau as DCTA Secretary, or any of our Board members.

We are not going to entangle the Association in electoral politics. Of course, we get entangled in policy debates all the time. But, those are what happen after elections. What happens before elections is the province of the voters and people engaged in politics. If a candidate says that he supports DCTA policies, that may or may not be true, but it does not indicate that they have an endorsement from us. No one does.

Radio system moves ahead toward vendor selection.

As a result of the approval of the compromise on funding and implementing the new radio system for Dane County, Dane County issued requests for proposals and received responses on December 1, 2010. Six (6) voting members came together as a review committee immediately thereafter, and reviewed the proposals. The Towns Association designated me as its representative. The review involved: reading four (4) proposals that were approximately five hundred (500) pages each in length and assigning written scores to each proposal using a detailed scoring matrix developed by the Dane County Purchasing Division in tandem with the Public Safety Communications Office.

Several of the higher – scoring vendors were invited to make oral presentations, each of which took an entire day during the week of December 13, 2010. The evaluation panelists were advised by about a dozen public safety officials throughout Dane County. The oral presentations were scored. The written and oral scores were to be combined with the price proposed by the vendors. A selection will be made in the near future.

Several observations were emerged from this intensive review. First, I am absolutely convinced that the new radio system is worth every penny. It takes a considerable amount of time and study to learn the capabilities of this system, and fully appreciate how much progress it represents. It is so much more than simply moving to the new frequencies mandated by federal law. There will be an open architecture which every public agency will share and be linked to all the others. It will enhance public safety in ways we can only begin to imagine. It gives us more choices of vendors future and allows the system to be continually upgraded as more capabilities develop. Indeed, just in the period of time that we debated

the County system, the price of the base and hand held radios has fallen significantly, and shows every sign of continuing to fall. Although it is not easy to come up with the money today, the advantages to Towns of interoperable radio communications in highway trucks and other Town vehicles are great.

Second observation. Dane County is very fortunate to have extremely capable leadership in its public safety communications area. John DeJung and his assistant Rich McVicar are both extremely knowledgeable, highly conscientious and dedicated. They have put in an enormous amount of time and effort in specifying and making this system a reality. John DeJung, particularly, made numerous appearances in support of the initiative, and managed to keep his calm and integrity throughout. There is no doubt in my mind that without the efforts of two people, John DeJung and County Board Chairman, Scott McDonell, we would have no radio system.

Third. The County has done a very good job, largely behind the scenes and under the radar of moving to update radio communications and public safety support independent of the radio system proposal. During the course of the system review, I had the chance to have a tour of the current Public Safety Dispatch Center in the City County Building. I had previously seen the Center in late 2007. At that time, the Center lagged in technology and security. I am pleased to say that the County has made enormous progress in modernizing the Center. Better consoles, updated computers, and enhanced security contribute to the safety of all of us. In 2007, I could not say that the Communications Center was up to the level of a post – 9/11 World. Without getting into details, it appears to me that Mr. DeJung and his team, with the support of the County leadership, have spent a lot of money to bring us to that point. The radio project constitutes a further round for moving forward.

Zoning Task Force to examine issues with accessory buildings.

Pat Downing's highly successful Task Force on revision of the County Zoning Ordinance is going to be evaluating the zoning regulations on accessory buildings. The regulations vary quite significantly between zoning districts, without apparent rhyme or reason. The Task Force will be looking at what kinds of accessory uses are appropriate to various kinds of uses, such as residential, rural homes, and agricultural. Many Town officials have issues about accessory buildings, which have been a perennial source of commentary and discussion over the past fifteen (15) years. We invite Town officials to forward these concerns to the attention of the Task Force through sending an e-mail to Renee Lauber (reneelauber@consultant.com), or Pat Downing (downhome@tds.net), or Todd Violante (Violante@countyofdane.com).

Keeping Track Of Dane County Ordinances and Meetings

Dane County recently reworked its website, www.countyofdane.com. The website now has links to the pages which show progress of resolutions and ordinances, the text of all introduced proposals, minutes, and the County Board schedule: <http://www.countyofdane.com/board/> . The county Board Committee schedule is at http://www.countyofdane.com/clerk/meeting_list.aspx. If you click on the committee's name, you'll be routed to the meeting agenda and minutes.

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