CITY – COUNTY CONSOLIDATION:
A LOOK AT THE POSITIVES
Legislative Process in Kansas

- Governor
  - Appoints Commission

- Commission
  - Makes Recommendation
  - Approves
  - Disapproves

- Legislature

- Citizens
  - Vote
The Basics

- 32 successful consolidations since 1805
  - Most successes take place in the Southeast
  - Less than 15% of attempts succeed
- Argument for efficiency
- Often viewed as politically unfeasible
The premise: shrinking population, high taxes, rising crime rates...a dying community

Original Bill died in the Legislature in 1968

Talk of consolidation resurfaced as viable in the 1980s
Annexation not an option
- County refused to allow annexation of Piper

Opportunities for consolidation
- Began with talk of consolidating specific services
  - Jail
  - Road & Bridge
  - Planning & Zoning
  - Administrative & Support Areas
Wyandotte Co. / Kansas City, KS

- **1987:** Talk of total consolidation with formation of study group by County Commission
  - Disbanded due to lack of citizen support
- **1994:** Citizen Task Force was established with governmental corruption as motivation
  - Led by Kevin Kelley
  - Support from Chamber of Commerce, mayor, city council, League of Women Voters
  - Recommended unified government
  - Second focus on legislative support
Spring 1996: Bill 464 passed Kansas state legislature & Formed Consolidation Study Commission
- Tasked with recommending 1 of 3 options to Governor Bill Graves
  - Full structural consolidation of Wyandotte Co. & KCK
  - Functional consolidation
  - No action

Fall 1996: 32 public hearings took place on the matter
January 15, 1997: Hearings held in Kansas state legislature with formal presentation to the Governor
- Consolidation Study Commission recommended option 1
- Legislature accepted

April 1, 1997: Citizens vote in favor of consolidation by 60%

April – September 1997: Transition Team was established and started transition process
September 9, 1997: Elections for Unified Commission

October 1, 1997: Unified Government Commission was sworn into office

August 1998: Unified Commission adopted budget and new organizational structure

January 1, 1999: Unified Government is fully functional
Wyandotte Co. / Kansas City, KS

- Why it worked

- Accelerator Event
  - Scandal involving public official or agency
  - Community emergency
  - Criticism of government by distinguished, outside source
  - Sudden loss of influential leader

- Which of these happened in Wyandotte Co. /KCK?
Ah, the Benefits!

Stated by Dennis Hays:

- Population has stabilized
- Property tax rates cut by more than 10%
- Single-family housing stats are at record levels
- Property values are steadily increasing
- Philanthropic recognition and investment
- Taxpayers support of school bond issues
- Reinvestment in the Urban Core
- New Growth and Development including Kansas Speedway & Tourism District
- Strength in a single policy-making body
Where would Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas be without consolidation?

No one really knows...

Speculations
- Very high taxes
- People leaving in droves
- High crime
Concluding Remarks

- Any questions?
- Comments?
Sources

- Hays, Dennis. *Chronology of Unified Government Consolidation: Wyandotte County/ Kansas City, KS*
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