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Mon, 04 Apr, 2011

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## Merge Detroit, county?

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Most say Snyder's idea 'no good for Detroit'

By [Zenobia Jeffries](#)  
[The Michigan Citizen](#)

DETROIT — Governor Rick Snyder's revenue-sharing incentive for local governments to merge city services is not being received by some Detroit elected officials.

In fact, much of what the freshman governor has proposed and the laws he's enacted in his first three months on the job are undemocratic, some say.

"With only 90 days logged, I don't think anything taken out of his camp can be taken as a good gesture," Senator Bert Johnson, D-Detroit, said in a telephone interview. "Everything he's done to this point has been damaging to people's health, safety and welfare."

Although Johnson says there has to be a comparative analysis to determine whether a collaborative effort would work for the city of Detroit, he says he doesn't see any benefits of such a move for the city.

"In years past the city has been solvent except when people torturously intruded on its ability to self-govern," Johnson said.

A recently released survey by The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) shows 72 percent of Michigan's local jurisdictions are currently involved in some type of formal collaborative effort with another unit of government. For larger jurisdictions, those with more than 10,000 residents, the number increases to 92 percent.

"The Governor isn't saying that services or city-county mergers must occur," wrote Sara Wurfel, the governor's press secretary, in an e-mail. "[He's only saying] they should be allowed to occur if it makes sense, saves money and/or services and is something a particular community [or communities] determine(s) is in their best interest. Essentially, that's a local decision."

Wurfel says the governor only wants to make sure the state has removed the "roadblocks that impede intergovernmental cooperation."

In a published report, Snyder explained how he thought a merger should look. It would create metropolitan government. In that structure, "existing county government would be superseded" and "the legislative and executive powers of the city would be transferred to the metropolitan government."

"The final decision regarding such consolidation should be left at the local level, but the consideration of such consolidation must not be prevented or discouraged by state government," Snyder said in his special message on local government reform.

There's been no indication from the mayor's office or county

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executive's office that such a merger is being considered at this point.

Neither Mayor Dave Bing's office or Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano's office responded by press time.

Johnson says the county has its own set of problems. Since the Ficano administration purchased the Guardian Building, the county has struggled with deficits which are now at \$250 million.

"I don't see where [Ficano] can handle Detroit as well," Johnson said.

Cuyahoga County municipalities in Ohio, where Cleveland is the largest city, have been considering the "r" word — regionalization — for years. Similar to Michigan and Detroit, with a great population loss and budget cuts, the talks are getting serious.

According to a March 15 news report on Cleveland.com, Cuyahoga County Executive Ed FitzGerald says the cities can't be forced to merge, but the county would help facilitate the process.

Even with talk of merging fire departments in one part of the county and police service and equipment in another, the county and city officials recognize the political challenge of a full out merger.

Detroit Councilmember JoAnn Watson says a merger would be problematic for Detroit.

"However, that or any expansion of Detroit must retain the city of Detroit," Watson responded in an e-mail.

According to Watson, where similar city-county mergers have occurred, the major city was preserved.

"Detroit is, of course the historical, geographical and infrastructural heart and center of Wayne County and southeastern Michigan. Any expansion or merger should logically retain this anchoring role for Detroit in the region."

In fact, Watson says, it should rebuild Detroit as the area's center and reintegrate what has disintegrated through businesses and population leaving Detroit over the last 50 years.

Regionalization of southeast Michigan has been floated about for decades. While some municipalities local and otherwise have accepted the idea as beneficial for its citizens, Detroiters have always been leery of such a move. Takeovers of the city's assets have happened and been suggested under the auspices of regionalization.

State Rep. John Olumba, D-HP, likened the relationship between Detroit and its surrounding areas to the kid on the block nobody wants to play with.

"Between other cities, we may see cooperation, but with Detroit, its exploitation," Olumba said. "I have seen this sort of cooperation before, on schoolyard playgrounds. There is a kid who is excluded by others, perhaps he is poor and what you find is that in order to get other kids to include him, that kid has to give something up, something he may not be able to afford, something which will not buy acceptance. This kid must submit to being used — today its his lunch money, tomorrow his new hat, the next its Cobo Hall and the next the water department."

Olumba calls this a tragedy but says "the kid" can improve his situation through self-determination.

"One day he will decide who is picked to play ball."

Still, 50 percent of the local leaders in Michigan's 85 counties believe Snyder's revenue sharing incentives would be effective, according to CLOSUP's survey. Sixty-nine percent say grants to offset higher costs often found in the first few years of new collaborative efforts would be effective at encouraging more cooperation.



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