

Winnebago County Judiciary and Public Safety Committee

May, 2021

Board of Supervisors Size Recommendation Summary

“Good boards are, very simply, high-functioning work groups. They are distinguished by a climate of respect, trust, and candor among board members and between the board and management. Information is shared openly and on time; emergent political factions are quickly eliminated.” (Source: “What Makes Great Boards Great” [Harvard Business Review](#) 80(9):106-13, 126, October 2002)

Background

As most County board supervisors are aware, interest in board size reduction has been and is on the minds of many Winnebago County constituents and shared by some supervisors. An analysis of required board size was completed in November 1990, an extensive study titled: *Winnebago County Task Force of Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, conducted by a group of county board and citizen members. The task force included county board member, Orrin King, and former board member (and future County Executive), James Coughlin, five additional county board members, and seven community leaders including UWO professor, Steve Hintz and UW Fox Valley professor, Larry White. At the time, Winnebago County had the second largest county board in the nation out of 3044 counties with 45 supervisors. The task force recommended a minimum of 15 and maximum of 30 supervisors to improve efficiency (pg. 10). The Board of Supervisors in service at the time reduced board size to 38. (Source: *Task Force Study: “Efficiency and Effectiveness of Winnebago County Government, Final Report,”* dated **November 1990**, pp. 7-10; Report available at the Oshkosh Public Library).

Another study, “*Winnebago County Exploration Committee Final Report,*” dated **October 31, 2001**, designed to reform committee structure and supervisor pay equity, was submitted for full board consideration by task force members Tom Brown, professor, Dale Feinauer, Julie Pung, Joe Maehl, Dave Metzsig, Mark Nielsen, Harvey Rengstorf and John Schaidler. (Source: Paul Eisen; report available at the Oshkosh Public Library).

In **2006-2007**, then Chairman David Albrecht, reported findings from a *Temporary Committee on County Board Size* to counterbalance the citizen initiative to reduce board size to 18 supervisors, resulting in a recommended board size of 28 members. County board supervisors voted to reduce size from 38 to 36 members. The *Temporary Committee's* recommendations became a task to carry out at the next census having found that 28 members should provide adequate rural constituent representation and enough members to cover committee, board and commission responsibilities. As evidenced by current board size, the board of supervisors took no action on the plan following the 2010 census.

In **2010/2011**, the League of Women Voters conducted a public forum to discuss board size reduction and present Waukesha, Wood and Fond du Lac counties experience with board size reduction, streamlining the boards and yet maintaining adequate public representation.

UW Extension has provided a map of counties that includes the number of supervisors on boards. With the exception of Outagamie and Winnebago Counties, all of the immediate surrounding counties have reduced board size to 25 or 26 supervisors. This includes Brown County with a considerably larger population.

The total number of Wisconsin County Board members has been decreasing since the enactment of Act 100 in 2006.

Current Board Size by Adjacent/Comparable Counties

- Winnebago: 36 (of 47 members allowed by law)
- Outagamie: 36 (of 47)
- Brown: 26 (of 47)
- Fond du Lac: 25 (of 47)
- Sheboygan: 25 (of 47)
- Washington: 26 (of 47)
- Dane, Marathon (72 to 38 in '06 due to area size), Sauk, Dodge, Jefferson, Oconto and Outagamie: 30 or more supervisors.
- Only Dane, Marathon, Outagamie and Winnebago have over 35 supervisors.

Supervisors by Constituent Population (2010)

Winnebago: 166,994 (2010) – 4,639 per supervisor
Brown: 267,296 – 10,280 per supervisor
Outagamie: 173,656 – 4,824 per supervisor
Fond du Lac: 101,633 – 4,065 per supervisor
Washington: 131,887 – 5,047 per supervisor
Marathon: 136,234 – 3,585 per supervisor
Dane: 556,189 – 15,032 per supervisor

If Winnebago County targeted 10,000 people per supervisor, the board size would be about 17. At 25 supervisors, there would be about 6,679 constituents represented by each supervisor; 28 supervisors would each serve about 5,964 citizens. A size of 28 supervisors strikes a balance between a maximum size allowed board of 47 and minimum of 18 and is, therefore, recommended.

Authority to Reduce Board of Supervisors Size

WI Statute 59.10:

SUBCHAPTER III COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

59.10

59.10 Boards: composition; election; terms; compensation; compatibility. The boards of the several counties shall be composed of representatives from within the county who are elected and compensated as provided in this section. Each board shall act under sub. [\(2\)](#), [\(3\)](#) or [\(5\)](#), unless the board enacts an ordinance, by a majority vote of the entire membership, to act under sub. [\(1\)](#). If a board enacts such ordinance, a certified copy shall be filed with the secretary of state.

Rationale for Downsizing

- 1. Constituent History – County and newspaper records show continuous public, community leadership and County supervisor interest in board size reduction. Articles and documents date back to 1987 and through the most recent 2021 Judiciary and Public Safety Committee unanimous vote. Winnebago County supervisors have failed to act on the recommendations of previous reports and trends of other counties.**
- 2. Winnebago and Outagamie County boards remain the largest in the region.**

- 3. The advantages of “right -sized” boards (and committees) include: more competition for elected positions (hopefully translating to qualified/experienced/engaged candidates; fewer board vacancies, appointments and write-in candidates (who lack a vetting process); increased communication and decision-making ability; reduced administrative cost, etc.**
- 4. Disadvantages include modest cost savings other than administrative labor hours and expenses.**
- 5. Board size reduction does impact the number of people available for committee, board and commission assignments. The solution is to consolidate committees/commission/boards where possible and recruit non-voting, advisory members of committees who demonstrate skills related to the scope of work.**
 - a. Current County board rules (23.1) provide for 12 standing committees of 5 members each, plus (1), the Legislative Committee with 15 county board members (County Board Chairman/Vice Chairman, Board, Commission and Committee Chairpersons. At 36 members, 24 supervisors qualify for 2 committees and 12 qualify for 3 committees. At 28 members, 24 supervisors qualify for 2 committees and 4 qualify for 3 committees. Other boards and commissions provide additional opportunity for supervisor involvement (15 Citizen Involved Commissions, Boards and Committees, approximately 35 positions may be filled by supervisors, some require Chairman/Vice Chairman only and a few do not require supervisor representation).**
- 6. In a recent Wisconsin Counties Association redistricting presentation, the recommendation for the “ideal district size” was 10,000 constituents (with 10 percent +/-). Presenters added that differences between the largest and smallest districts must be justified, for example, due to a population area that has few people or special groups unable or unwilling to hold office. District size should also be very sensitive to minority populations and reasonably compact, “looking like other districts.” (Ben Conrad and Marcie Rainbolt, posted online at WCA).**
- 7. In general, not-for-profit and county government boards are trending to smaller sizes that maintain adequate representation.**
- 8. Constituents maintain and possibly increase access to supervisors due to the smaller number. A board size of 28 members is also large enough to maintain a rigorous presence of rural representation. Recommending that the criteria used in district mapmaking include the factors of**

compactness, contiguity, respect for political subdivisions and community interests, maximizing rural representation will be maintained.

9. Although yet another Winnebago County study could be contracted, it appears to be more appropriate to walk through the open door of the census and act now.
10. Checks and balances apropos to a 36-member board extends similarly to a 28-member board:

<u>Votes Required:</u>	<u>36 Districts:</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>28 Districts</u>
<u>%</u>			
Majority	19	53	15
54			
1/3 for negative quorum	12	33	10
36			
2/3 for override veto	24	67	19
68			
3/4 for bonding	27	75	21
75			

- Percentages rounded up; 28 supervisors slightly increases the voting power of individual supervisors

Suggested Research Resources

1. “Winnebago County Exploration Committee Final Report,” October 31, 2001 (Oshkosh Public Library)
2. “Task Force on the Size of Marathon County Board of Supervisors Final Report,” December 2020
3. “Washington County Board Size and Committee Restructure,” UW Extension July 9, 2020; County website

Respectfully Submitted,

**Winnebago County
 Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
 Bill Wingren, Chairman
 Tom Ellis, Vice Chairman
 Vicki Schorse, Secretary**

Paul Eisen *
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*** Special thanks to Supervisors Eisen and Schorse for research on this issue and preparation of this document. Supervisor Eisen maintains an extensive archive of Winnebago County board discussion and actions on this issue.**

FINAL 8/7/21