

# White Paper for The Citizens' Efficiency Commission



February 6, 2012

## Citizens' Efficiency Commission Philosophy on Recommendations

### Key findings:

- The CEC requires a well-defined philosophy concerning numerous terms and concepts in its mission statement.
- Best practices in local government efficiency research, as well as the CEC by-laws' structure, suggest the benefits of well-validated and thorough recommendations for implementation purposes.
- SSCRPC staff finds that the CEC's process for developing recommendations includes multiple stages, and suggests that the CEC consider a series of questions as it constructs multi-component recommendations.

### Introduction

The Citizens' Efficiency Commission for Sangamon County has recognized a need for a well-defined philosophy regarding its role in relation to government and the nature of its recommendations. The mission statement of the CEC is "to improve local government economy, efficiency and effectiveness by assessing and proposing opportunities for improved cooperation, coordination and reduction or elimination of duplication of effort and the sharing of services between and among local governments in Sangamon County."

The CEC's work requires an explicit philosophy and shared definitions for a number of reasons. The first is that the CEC is a large and diverse body, with twenty-three members appointed by different jurisdictions, and diversity in areas of experience and expertise. The CEC can likely function more smoothly and efficiently with a clear understanding of its own intentions and philosophical assumptions.

Secondly, the CEC's findings and recommendations, in keeping with its by-laws, are intended for all relevant jurisdictions and the general public. The CEC works in an advisory capacity, with no formal mechanisms for enforcing the implementation of its recommendations. If recommendations are to be supported by the constituency and implemented effectively by municipal officials, a clear understanding of the CEC's philosophy may become important to comprehending the Commission's intent in its recommendations. A well-defined and transparent recommendation process may also provide the public with a clear vision and understanding of the CEC's work.

This paper represents SSCRPC staff's attempt to articulate the definitions and assumptions that inform the CEC's work, and to identify the process and framework for CEC recommendations. Although this document emphasizes the process for developing CEC recommendations, a more extensive glossary of terms relevant to the CEC's philosophy is provided in Appendix B.

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## Developing CEC Recommendations

Citizens' Efficiency Commissioners have found that coming to a recommendation for improvements local government proves to be complex and potentially confusing. What goes into a recommendation? What level of validation should be required to fully support a recommendation throughout its implementation process?

At their January 2012 meeting, Commissioners received a visit from Mr. Bruce Cowans of Maximus Consulting. He provided insights to the CEC regarding his process for identifying efficiency opportunities. The steps discussed included, but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Define the question at hand.
- 2) Develop and define the multiple options for answering this question.
- 3) Describe the consequences of multiple and distinct options.
- 4) Determining which values should be applied in prioritizing alternatives with unequal consequences.
- 5) Choose an alternative.
- 6) Develop an implementation plan.

This process can serve as a guide for commissioners so that recommendations undergo a process that ensures their validity and ability to be implemented.

The CEC also has some constraints in its bylaws pertaining to formal recommendations. In Article V, Section 2E:

**Draft Reports and Publications:** Draft committee and taskforce reports, and similar publications, to be considered for Commission action will be forwarded by the committee or taskforce chairperson to Commission members for their review no less than ten (10) working days in advance of the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting unless otherwise directed by the Commission's Chairperson. Commissioners shall submit to the committee or taskforce chair any comments they may have on the report draft no later than five (5) business days prior to the scheduled Commission meeting where the draft report will be considered.

These time frames are intended to provide commissioners opportunity to scrutinize all documentation provided by committees and to determine if all relevant questions have been addressed. Although this process may be more or less complex depending upon the substance of the recommendation, the existence of such guidelines suggests that recommendations may include a considerable amount of background information and substantive analysis.

In practice, CEC committees have found it useful to identify areas we have called "findings," or general subject matter where a potential recommendation may exist. Upon the identification of a "finding" the committee should approach

the full Citizens' Efficiency Commission for approval and/or authorization to give further consideration to the issue at hand. Following a discussion and vote, when this approval has been given, the committee can proceed to develop the recommendation through research and documentation. The recommendation developed from the committee then represents a proposed or draft recommendation, which will be distributed to the Commission for review and approval per CEC By-laws (indicated above).

### **Conclusions: Specifications for a Complete CEC Recommendation**

Given these considerations, SSCRPC staff recommends that a well-validated recommendation may include the following:

- A definition of the question at hand and its scope, likely in the form of a finding presented to the full Commission to gain support for an in-depth committee examination of the issue.
- An overview of the history and/or currently existing institutional structures involved in the recommendation.
- A consideration of alternative courses of action, and an analysis of benefits and costs of each.
- A recommendation concerning which alternative should be taken and the rationale or relevant values for this choice.
- An overview of a feasible course of action for implementation that relevant jurisdictions could follow.

As it compiles the detailed information implied by these bullet points, the CEC may also want to consider a series of "test questions" as a framework for its recommendations. We have provided some such test questions as an appendix to this white paper. SSCRPC staff hopes that this document will assist the CEC in strengthening the overall quality of its recommendations, in keeping with best practices in other efficiency-oriented public bodies, to increase ease and likelihood of implementation.

Appendix A

**Recommendations Test Questions**

<b>Recommendation Test Questions for CEC Committees</b>			
<b>Question</b>		<b>Potential Responses</b>	<b>Follow-up Considerations</b>
<i>What question are we asking in researching this recommendation?</i>			<i>Are there other factors, questions, or findings that can or should be considered?</i>
<i>Does this recommendation yield greater efficiency, effectiveness, or both?</i>	1	Efficiency	<i>Are there ways to encompass effectiveness as well?</i>
	2	Effectiveness	<i>Are there ways to encompass efficiency as well?</i>
<i>What type of efficiency or improved service will it achieve?</i>	1	Input (less cost for same output)	<i>Can other types of efficiency be achieved through similar actions? Does the recommendation conflict with other efficiency objectives?</i>
	2	Output (more product/service for same cost)	
	3	Throughput (better process, or service)	
<i>What will the economic benefit be?</i>	1	High Cost-savings	
	2	Low Cost-savings	<i>Are the measurable benefits significant enough to make the recommendation worthwhile?</i>
	3	Other resource savings	<i>How can these resources be quantified?</i>
<i>What other types of benefits are involved in this recommendation?</i>		Time savings, etc.	<i>Can benefits be quantified or expanded?</i>
<i>At what level of difficulty are the actions involved in the recommendation?</i>	1	Low difficulty (informal cooperation)	<i>Would the agreement become more useful or more easily generalized if formalized?</i>
		Mid-range (intergovernmental agreements, etc.)	
		High difficulty (legal consolidation)	<i>Is there an easier way to accomplish the same goal?</i>
<i>Who will this affect?</i>	1	Single jurisdiction	<i>Can we extend the benefits of the recommendation?</i>
	2	Multiple Jurisdictions	<i>Does the recommendation require collaborative efforts? Are they feasible?</i>

Can we measure the outcome of this recommendation?	1	Performance metrics available	How will data be collected? By whom? How difficult will it be?
	2	Performance metrics unavailable	Can an alternative recommendation be considered? How can measurement data be collected or developed?
Is there a clear path to implementation for this recommendation?		Yes	Do(es) the jurisdiction(s) involved have the resources to address the issue?
		No	Have we provided enough background information to validate implementation suggestions?
What is the cost of implementing this recommendation?	1	High cost	Are the cost-savings worth it? Is there a less expensive way to address this issue?
	2	Moderate cost	Are the cost-savings worth it? Is there a less expensive way to address this issue?
	3	Low cost	
How far is the reach of this recommendation?	1	Short-term impact	Can the improvement be extended?
	2	Long-term impact	
Is there precedent for this type of cooperation?	1	Pre-existing agreement exists between these jurisdictions	Can we extend these agreements to other functions of government?
	2	Pre-existing agreement exists on this function	How can we apply those agreements to other jurisdictions?
	3	No pre-existing agreements exist	Are there examples elsewhere that can be modeled locally?
What level of specificity does this recommendation entail?	1	High specificity	Can this recommendation benefit from being generalized?
Is the recommendation legal?	1	Yes	What is the applicable authority (ILCS)?
	2	No	Should an amendment to current law be proposed? Who should be responsible for drafting the language for a proposed change?

How high is the legal threshold for achieving this recommendation?	1	High (difficult legal proceedings required)	Should a different avenue for achieving this goal be considered?
	2	Low	Can informal cooperative efforts be encouraged?
Is a local referendum required?	1	Yes	Who should sponsor the referendum?
	2	No	Why not? Would a referendum be beneficial?
How visible is this recommendation?	1	High visibility	Will publicity be positive or negative?
	2	Low visibility	How can benefits be made more broadly known?
What will be the response of the leaders in affected jurisdictions?	1	Positive	What are the anticipated benefits local officials expect?
	2	Unknown	Should a survey of public officials be conducted?
	3	Negative	Can this negative response be resolved, reduced, or eliminated?
What will be the response of constituents in affected jurisdictions?	1	Positive	What are the anticipated benefits to the community? Can these be augmented or publicized?
	2	Unknown	When and by whom should a survey be conducted to identify local opinion related to this initiative?
	3	Negative	Can this negative response be resolved, reduced, or eliminated? Should the recommendation be reconsidered?
What types of changes in local government services will result from this recommendation?	1	Lower quality services	Is another recommendation possible? How can these detriments be countered? Is it worth making this recommendation?
	2	Higher quality services	
	3	No changes	What is the alternative perceived benefit of the recommendation?

## Appendix B

### **Glossary: CEC-related Definitions of Terms**

SSCRPC staff finds that a philosophical “glossary” provides a simple way of clarifying definitions in relation to the mission of the CEC, which in turn leads to increased clarity in the process of forming recommendations. The listing below contains a collection of operational definitions as they pertain to the work of the CEC.

The mission of the CEC is to improve local government economy, efficiency and effectiveness by assessing and proposing opportunities for improved cooperation, coordination and reduction or elimination of duplication of effort and the sharing of services between and among local governments in Sangamon County.

This glossary considers terminology relevant to the mission of the CEC. Some of these definitions rely on outside sources, such as the Merriam-Webster dictionary and the scholarly literature on the subject matter, yet the glossary tailors definitions to their use specific to the CEC context with the bullet points included beneath the definitions. We have selected terms based on either the CEC mission or common use in CEC discussion.

**Economy:** *Frugality, or the use of minimal resources, in the provision of a given service.*

- As relevant to the CEC's examination of local jurisdictions, economy generally applies to fiscal efficiency concerns, comparable to “input” efficiency, particularly in the monetary sense, explained below.

**Effectiveness:** *Being capable to achieve, or achieving, a stated goal.*

- With reference to the CEC's mission, improved effectiveness implies that local jurisdictions achieve objectives in a manner aligned with policy goals or public service provision, i.e. ease to constituents. Effectiveness can be considered linked to “throughput” efficiency, defined below.

**Efficiency:** *Performing of a designated function in a manner that utilizes minimum resources to achieve maximum results, or has the most favorable ratio of inputs to outputs.*

- Efficiency can be broken into three categories: input, output, throughput efficiency. In input efficiency, a reduced amount of inputs, such as resources, money, or personnel hours, produces the same output. In output efficiency, the same amount of inputs produces more output. In creating throughput efficiency for local governments, changes do not decrease needed inputs OR

increase outputs, but result in a higher quality of service. Throughput efficiency is similar to the concept of effectiveness.

- The CEC often uses “efficiency” in a manner which suggests a single opportunity for the creation of the quality of efficiency in a unit of government, e.g. “to identify where an efficiency might exist.”

**Finding:** *A formal description of an identified subject matter in which the CEC recognizes indicators of possible efficiency or effectiveness that could be implemented by local governments.*

- Findings may be considered the informal or formal product of the “assessing” role identified in the CEC’s mission statement.
- Upon the identification and description of a finding, the CEC may call for relevant jurisdictions to provide additional research pertaining to the opportunity for efficiency.

**Function:** *An activity, role or purpose performed by; and specific to; a unit of government.*

- With reference to the CEC mission statement, functions may entail the efforts in which the CEC can identify “cooperation, coordination and reduction or elimination of duplication of effort,” and the term is generally inclusive of “services” provided by local governments, as well as the back office or administrative support for such services.
- The CEC often discusses “functions of government” that the various jurisdictions undergoing examination have in common. Functions can be services provided to the community or those administrative and support actions required to ensure that a service provision occurs. The CEC and SSCRPC have identified the following as general functions of local government:

*Administration; Capital Facilities, Infrastructure, Equipment; Communication; Community and Economic Development; Elections; Environmental Protection; Fiscal Administration; Human Resources; Information Technology; Legal and Judicial; Parks, Recreation, and Culture; Planning; Public Education; Public Health; Public Safety; Public Works; Transportation.*

**Government:** *The organization, institution, or set of mechanisms through which a public entity defines and exercises its authority and performs functions in keeping with said authority.*

- Within the scope of its work, the CEC often refers to a single “unit” of government, meaning an entity intended to provide a specific set of functions within a specific jurisdictional territory. The units of government with which the CEC interacts are generally those defined as taxing bodies in the Illinois Constitution and Municipal Code.
- Operationally, units of government will function as one of the recipients of CEC recommendations, and may be called upon to implement recommendations by interacting with other units of government. The public citizenry will also be primary recipients of CEC recommendations.

**Local Government:** *Those institutions or bodies who, through delegation from the state, have the primary responsibility for certain expressed functions of government within a more narrowly defined geography.*

- Local units of government range in scope from general-purpose jurisdictions such as the county to special districts. The CEC suggests that 110 units of local government exist in Sangamon County, including the county, municipalities, townships, special districts and independent school districts.

**Jurisdiction:** *A synonym for a “unit” of government. A jurisdiction is the authority backing the provision of specific functions of government, along with the territory associated with this authority.*

**Public:** *The citizens within the territory of a unit of government.*

- For the CEC’s purposes, the public includes all residents of Sangamon County.

**Recommendation:** *A formal advisory report summarizing a suggested action that relevant units of local government should undergo in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness.*

- Such a document should include descriptive validation of why efficiency may exist in the way described, and suggested steps toward examining and implementing the efficiency.
- Recommendations may be considered the formal product of the “proposing” aspect of the CEC’s mission.

**Service:** *An action or function provided by a unit of government for members of the public within the sphere of its jurisdiction.*

- Typically, services are the functions of government of which members of the public are direct recipients, in contrast to the supportive functions behind these services.

**Information compiled by Jeff Fulgenzi and Amy Uden, SSCRPC, and prepared for the Sangamon County Citizens' Efficiency Commission.**

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The Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) serves as the joint planning body for Sangamon County and the City of Springfield, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for transportation planning in the region.

The Commission has 17 members including representatives from the Sangamon County Board, Springfield City Council, special units of government, and six appointed citizens from the city and county. The Executive Director is appointed by the Executive Board of the Commission and confirmed by the Sangamon County Board.

The Commission works with other public and semi-public agencies throughout the area to promote orderly growth and redevelopment, and assists other Sangamon County communities with their planning needs. Through its professional staff, the SSCRPC provides overall planning services related to land use, housing, recreation, transportation, economics, environment, and special projects. It also houses the Sangamon County Department of Zoning which oversees the zoning code and liquor licensing for the County.

The Commission prepares area-wide planning documents and assists the County, cities, and villages, as well as special districts, with planning activities. The staff reviews all proposed subdivisions and makes recommendations on all Springfield and Sangamon County zoning and variance requests. The agency serves as the county's Plat Officer, Floodplain Administrator, Census coordinator, and local A-95 review clearinghouse to process and review all federally funded applications for the county. The agency also maintains existing base maps, census tract maps, township and zoning maps and the road name map for the county.

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