



Neighbors

Newsletter of the Walworth County Intergovernmental Cooperation Council (I.C.C.)

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Government Center Square, December 2009

*Photo compliments of Jack Delaney
Walworth County Public Works Department*

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Upcoming I.C.C. Meeting

Please note, the next I.C.C. meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, February 23 - 6 PM**. Topics for the meeting include:

- Census 2010 update
- Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative
- State DOR proposal to implement countywide assessment
- Germanfest 2010
- Room Tax
- “Permit Path” information website

If anyone has ideas for this upcoming meeting or future I.C.C. agendas, feel free to contact:

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United States Census 2010

The U.S. Census Bureau will begin gathering census data from homes across the country in just a few weeks. The *Janesville Gazette* recently reported that, according to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, gathering accurate census data will be a challenge. One in five people are likely not to participate in the Census. The poll cited lack of interest and distrust of government as some reasons for non-participation. The Walworth County I.C.C. has assumed the role of a Complete Count Committee for the county as well as a number of towns, cities and villages. Lou Olson from the county has been coordinating that effort. It is our hope that every resident of the county will be counted. Enclosed with this newsletter is the Census 2010 survey form, which includes ten questions that will be asked of each person participating in the Census. Lou will be at our meeting on February 23rd to provide the I.C.C. with a Census 2010 update.

Fraud Alert

Government leaders are conditioned to respond to requests for documents. In fact, State law generally requires that we provide records to the public, no questions asked. At the county, we recently reviewed a request for copies of invoices relative to our bulk purchases of fuel that were made by credit card. Based on a number of factors, it appears that the request was simply an attempt to gain County procurement card numbers. Be sure your employees are aware of such scams. When in doubt talk to your municipal attorney. In many instances, it is permissible to redact confidential data before releasing records.

Walworth County Named Germanfest 2010 “Honor County”

Walworth County received an invitation to serve as Honor County at the 2010 Germanfest celebration in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Our county was selected, in part, because of our successful “sister county” relationship with Waldeck-Frankenberg, Germany. The Walworth County Visitors Bureau is working with Milwaukee Germanfest officials to coordinate the event. The festival will provide the opportunity for local high school bands to perform. In addition to promoting tourism, businesses in Walworth County will have the opportunity to promote their products and services.

Tammy Dunn, Group Services Manager, Walworth County Visitors Bureau, will be at our February 23 meeting to talk about Germanfest. Save the date, July 22, to attend the opening day ceremony at Germanfest 2010. Admission is free that evening. To learn more about Germanfest, visit the festival’s website at www.germanfest.com. We are hoping to get as many Walworth County officials as possible to attend this year’s opening ceremony.

For more information about Germanfest 2010 and how your community might participate, contact the Walworth County Visitors Bureau at 262.723.3980 or email them at info@visitwalworthcounty.com.

State Countywide Assessment Proposal

By popular request, we have included on the February 23 Intergovernmental Cooperation Council agenda an item for discussion on the topic of countywide assessments. Wisconsin State officials have proposed legislation that would consolidate property assessments, making counties responsible to perform them. The legislation proposes requiring that assessments be updated each year to full market value and conducting an annual Department of Revenue audit. The proposal calls for a five-year phase-in, beginning with each municipality bringing its property values up to market value within three years.

Obviously, this legislation would have sweeping ramifications. Despite the fact that assessments and boards of review can be thankless jobs, I have not heard much support for the bill from city, town and village officials. As of the time of this writing, I have heard conflicting reports about the status of the Legislature, including one to the effect that the proposal was scrapped in favor of promoting consortiums. If anyone has any further information on this topic, please bring it forward at our next I.C.C. meeting.

Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative

The State of Wisconsin adopted the Wisconsin Working Lands initiative as part of the state’s 2009-2011 biennial budget process. Described in Chapter 91 of the Wisconsin Statutes, the initiative’s main components include: 1) expansion and modernization of the state’s existing farmland preservation program; 2) establishment of agricultural enterprise areas (AEAs); and, 3) development and purchase of an agricultural conservation easement (PACE) matching grant program. The Working Lands initiative will usher in significant changes in terms of land use in the State of Wisconsin. This legislation will have ramifications for towns as well as cities and villages. Lou Olson will provide a brief description of the initiative at our February 23 meeting.