



WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD STRUCTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Summary Report: 2019



Contents

Study Committee Members	2
Report Compiled by:.....	2
Background.....	3
Scope of Work and Timeline	3
Process	3
Preferred County Board Size	4
Appendix A: Strengths & Limitations of Current Board Size & Committee Structure	5
Appendix B: County Board Size in WI by WCA.....	7
Appendix C: Walworth County Overview	12
Appendix D: County Board Presentation on 2/12/20	13
Appendix E: County Board Resolution:	21

Study Committee Members

- Will Symicek, Committee Chair
- Chris Jenkins, Committee Vice-Chair
- John Bulawa
- Frank Carr
- Don Kriefall
- Mark McCune
- Marilyn Merten
- Jeffrey Schleif
- Keith Stephan

Report Compiled by:

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Background

Policy Question: What changes should be made to the structure of the Washington County Board of Supervisors as the 2020 census approaches, and the County transitions to a County Executive form of government?

Strategic Priority / Result Achieved: Well-governed and Administered County

Discussion: For the third time since 2014, we are having a discussion focused on County Board structure. It is especially important to evaluate structure and size at this time for two reasons. First of all, the 2020 census is approaching and will give us vital information in regards to redistricting. Secondly, for the first time in Washington County's history, the citizens will elect a County Executive. The structure of the County Board should adequately reflect the changes to population and form of government.

Scope of Work and Timeline

Below is the original scope of work and timeline presented at the October 14, 2019 Study Committee Meeting. The Committee met four times and made a recommendation to the Executive Committee on a preferred board size. This work plan and timeline will be adjusted after the Executive Committee and County Board approve a recommendation on preferred board size.

- Determine County Board Size for 2022
 - Research Comparable Counties
- Establish Committee Structure for 2022
 - Research Comparable Counties
 - Role and Responsibilities of Committees
 - Salaries
- Role and Responsibilities of County Board Chair
- County Board Staff Support
 - Research Comparable Counties
- Findings Presented at February 2020 County Board Meeting
 - Committee to meet Biweekly until Scope of Work is Complete

Process

10/14/19:

- Reviewed Advisory Committee Purpose, Scope of Work and Timeline
- Examined Board Size of Counties with the 12 Highest Populations
- Redistricting Presentation by GIS Manager Eric Damkot

10/28/19:

- Examined Historical Data & Future Projections of Redistricting
- Discussed Data and Findings of National and Wisconsin County Board Sizes & Structures
- Identified Strengths & Limitations of Current Board Size & Committee Structure- Appendix A
- Determined Questions for Wisconsin Counties Association & the National Association of Counties

11/15/19:

- Presentation by Jon Hochkammer from Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA)- Appendix B
- Reviewed and Discussed Committee of the Whole Concept
- Discussed Potential Options for Public Engagement (e.g. survey inserted with tax bills, public forums, public surveys, and an advisory referendum)

12/17/19:

- Discussion with Walworth County Officials (Board Chair and Administrator)- Appendix C
- Discussed Limitations of Public Engagement Options Researched
- Recommendation on Preferred Board Size

Meeting materials can be found on-line at <http://www.co.washington.wi.us/> by clicking on the meetings link and search for the agendas and minutes of the County Board Structure Advisory Committee.

Preferred County Board Size

At the conclusion of three Study Committee meetings, members identified their ideal county board size. The mean average after each vote was 16.

October 28, 2019:	5, 11, 13, 15, 17, 17, 21, 27	Mean average = 16
November 15, 2019:	9, 11, 11, 13, 19, 21, 21, 26	Mean average = 16
December 17, 2019:	11, 11, 13, 13, 15, 15, 21, 21, 28	Mean average = 16

At the conclusion of the December 17th meeting, the Study Committee voted 6 to 3 to recommend to the Board Executive Committee a board size of 21 members. Rationale for this recommendation include:

- Belief that there is broad-based support for a gradual reduction, which would be similar to the 2016 reduction of 30 to 26 board members.
- Unknowns related to the transition to a County Executive form of government.
- Reducing the board committee structure by 1 committee would result in needing 21 board members (4 committees with 5 members each plus the county board chair equals 21).
- The proposed board size of 21 is divisible by 3, which makes it easier to determine voting for resolutions that require a two-thirds vote.

On January 21, 2020, the Executive Committee voted 6 to 1 to forward a recommended board size of 21 to the full County Board to consider.

On February 12, 2020, Paul Roback presented a summary of Structure Advisory Committee's process, research, and findings to the Washington County Board (Appendix D). After discussion, the County Board passed 2019 Resolution 58 - Washington County Board of Supervisors - Board Size (Appendix E) to reduce the County Board size from 26 districts to 21 districts beginning with the 2022-2024 County Board session. The vote was Ayes-15; Noes-7; Absent-3; Vacant-1.

Appendix A: Strengths & Limitations of Current Board Size & Committee Structure

Current County Board Size

Strengths- what is working well?

- A lot of good lengthy discussions
- Most non-controversial votes have consensus
- Past board reduction has worked well
- The layout of the agenda packets is helpful
- With larger board, larger personalities don't dominate the conversation
- Closer contact with the citizenry
- Having enough people on committees allows for a diversity of opinions
- Each Supervisor is on one major committee
- With larger number, citizens may feel closer to their Supervisor and may feel more comfortable in contacting them
- The Executive Committee works well by having representation from each of the standing committees.

Limitations- what is hindering our success?

- Difficult committee conversations do not get forwarded to the county board- reports do not give you the tone and the full discussion that occurred
- Odd number of Supervisors is needed to prevent tie votes. A tie vote is the same as a defeated motion, which the public may perceive as the board not being in agreement.
- Awareness of what is going on isn't brought to all Supervisors- full committee conversations are not reported in the packet
- No reports from standing committee chairs at County Board meetings
- Lack newer/younger members on the County Board- how do we make it easier to attract these types of members (e.g. less meetings, electronic meetings, more use of technology...)
- Board members may lack county-wide perspective/representation
- Conflict of interest may occur when a County Board member also serves as a local elected official (e.g. fiduciary responsibility/conflict between county and local government). When there is a perceived conflict of interest, elected officials representing two government entities have not abstained from voting.
- Challenge of having Supervisors serving in positions where there may be a perceived conflict of interest (e.g. library committee members from communities that have libraries).
- Resistance to change
- Larger size hinders efficiency
- Lack the pulse of the citizenry (e.g. POWTS)
- Lack of political will to do the right thing on controversial issues- tend to bend to the noisiest people.
- Need fewer uncontested elections.
- Lack adequate and accurate news coverage- it doesn't get out to enough people
- Some Supervisors lack commitment and dedication by coming unprepared to meetings.
- The size of the board does not fairly and accurately reflect county demographics (e.g. age and gender).
- Board members who push back and challenge committee actions.
- Due to larger size, individual Supervisors can be too focused on local needs vs. the good of the whole county.

- Size effects short-term vs. long-term decisions (e.g. comprehensive planning and the road plan). People focused too narrowly on their district. The toughest decisions made by the Board have been the best decisions over the long-term.
- Size slows down our process.
- Because of the size of the board, there is an unfair advantage for those that can hold two offices at once (County Board and local office). They have a fiduciary advantage and an advantage in name recognition.

Current Committee Structure

Strengths- what is working well?

- All committees are a good size, which allows for a variety of opinions/perspectives and good debates.
- Committees have been given more authority and can take issues straight to the board.
- With the consolidated committee structure, we have become more efficient.
- Executive Committee structure with representation from each of the standing committees has worked well (similar to a Committee of the Whole).
- The effectiveness of the committees is related to good staff support systems.
- Committees meeting with department heads is important and a good thing.
- Consent agenda has increased efficiency.
- As we have done in the past, we can continue to change committees, agendas, and committee packets to make them better.

Limitations- what is hindering our success?

- Communicating committee information to the County Board- everyone is not getting the same information
- Appointment process- it is not a given that you will end up on a committee that you are interested in. This process can be examined and improved.
- There are too many departments under some committees. Not all of the department heads are able to present to the committee in-person. We need to continue to explore balancing committee workloads.
- Some may be stuck on a committee for too long and do not get the perspective/knowledge of other departments by serving on other committees. (We could explore committee term-limits or the ability to serve on multiple committees.)
- The change from operational committees to policy committees has been more difficult for some Supervisors.
- Committee Chairs may serve in their positions for too long.
- Cancellation of meetings is happening too frequently. We could use this time as educational session in order to learn more from departments.
- Supervisors resistant to change (e.g. technology and “we’ve always done it this way”).

County Board Size in Wisconsin

Washington County Board Structure
Advisory Committee Meeting
November 15, 2019



Jon Hochkammer, Outreach Manager
WISCONSIN COUNTIES ASSOCIATION

Facts Regarding County Board Size

WCA does not hold a position on the size of county boards. **This decision should be made at the local level.**

- ❖ Wisconsin adopted the New York model:
 - Made up of larger citizen boards of volunteers called county supervisors.
 - Most states use the Pennsylvania model - smaller boards with part-time or full-time paid commissioners.
- ❖ Wisconsin counties provide services on behalf of the state government
 - ie: Law enforcement, record keeping, courts, human services, road maintenance, emergency government and land conservation.
- ❖ Wisconsin requires counties to perform more services than most states in the nation.
 - Wisconsin is one of 13 states nationally requiring counties to perform human and social services.



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Things to Consider

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Smaller County Board Size

- Increases the opportunity for violations of the open meetings law.
- Can create difficulties meeting quorum requirements.
- Full county board may have additional work otherwise done at the committee level.
 - Time commitment may increase.
 - May require higher compensation.
 - Could exclude people from running for office.

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Things to Consider

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Smaller County Board Size

- Can provide efficiencies if the county reviews committee structure concurrently with board size reduction.
- Fewer meetings = more staff time for daily responsibilities.
- May broaden elected officials' perspectives.
 - More aware of the full scope of county operations.
 - Rather than serving on multiple department-specific committees, they set policy for more county departments and programs.
- May reduce representation in rural areas.
- Can make the redistricting process more difficult.
- Creates opportunities for special interest groups to get more involved and have less people to lobby or influence.

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Things to Consider

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Larger County Board Size

- Lessens the opportunity for violations of the open meetings law.
- Can help meet quorum requirements.
- More work can be done at the committee level vs. by the full board.
- Workload can be spread over a larger group of people.
 - Time commitment may decrease.
 - May reduce overall expenses.
 - Could allow more people to run for office.

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Things to Consider

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Larger County Board Size

- Can create duplication of efforts or overlap with more committees.
- More meetings = less staff time for daily responsibilities.
- May bring more expertise and life experience to the debate.
- May increase rural representation
- Special interest groups have more people to lobby and may lessen their influence.

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Common Misconceptions



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Misconception	Truth
Smaller board size creates more competition for board seats.	Counties that have reduced their size in the past decade have not experienced greater competition for supervisor elections.
Smaller boards cost less	Compensation (per diem or salary) increases may be warranted because of increased workload.
Smaller boards require members to become full-time supervisors.	Smaller board size does not require full-time supervisors, but supervisor responsibilities may increase.
Smaller boards offer the same opportunity for diversity, background, and experience as larger boards.	Larger boards may provide more opportunities for diversity of backgrounds and experiences that may be beneficial to the public.
Smaller board size allows the public to more easily identify their elected representative	Smaller board size may result in less accountability for elected officials. If an elected official represents fewer people, the public is more likely to know their elected official personally and may be more comfortable to contact them.

- ❖ Since the passage of **2005 Act 100**:
 - Eight counties had referendums regarding board size all in 2006 - 07
 - Five referendums passed, and three failed.
 - Douglas County had a referendum that failed in April 2007, 28 - 7
 - Fond du Lac County had a referendum pass in November 2006, from 36 to 18. In 2012, the board increased their size to 25
 - Jackson County had a referendum that failed in April 2007, 19 - 11
 - In Price County, the first referendum to go from 21 - 7 failed in April 2006, however in November 2006, the second referendum to go from 21 - 13 passed.
 - Rusk County had a referendum that failed in April 2007, 21 to 13
 - Walworth County had a referendum pass in April 2007, 25 to 11
 - Waushara County had a referendum pass in November 2006, from 21 to 11
 - Wood County had a referendum pass in November 2006, from 38 to 19
 - At the same time, a few counties reduced their board size on their own.
 - In 2005, there were a total of **1,789** county supervisors statewide.
 - In 2010, there were a total of **1,680** county supervisors statewide.

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Recent Changes to Board Size



- ❖ In 2012, following the federal required redistricting:
 - 14 counties reduced their county board size ranging from 1 member (Milwaukee County) to 14 members Chippewa County.)
 - Buffalo County - 16 to 14
 - Chippewa County - 29 to 15
 - Columbia County - 31 to 28
 - Dodge County - 37 to 33
 - Douglas County - 28 to 21
 - Fond du Lac County - 18 to 25 (increased the board by 7)
 - Kenosha County - 28 to 23
 - La Crosse County - 35 to 29
 - Milwaukee County - 19 to 18
 - Ozaukee County - 31 to 26
 - Portage County - 29 to 25
 - Racine County - 23 to 21
 - Rusk County - 21 to 19
 - Shawano County - 30 to 27
 - Sheboygan County - 34 to 25
 - In 2012, there were a total of **1,620** county supervisors statewide.

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Recent Changes to Board Size



- ❖ **2014:** Polk County reduced its board size from 23 to 15.
- ❖ **2016:** Monroe County reduced its size from 24 to 16 and Washington County reduced its size from 30 to 26 members.
- ❖ No changes in board size in **2018**.
- ❖ Currently there are **1,600** elected county board supervisors statewide.

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Recent Changes to Board Size



Appendix C: Walworth County Overview

Presenters: Administrator Dave Bretl and County Board Chair Nancy Russell

Discussion Notes:

- Based on the recommendation of a Blue Ribbon Study Committee, the board was downsized from 35 to 25 members in 2004.
- As a result of WI Act 100, a tax-payer petition resulted in a binding referendum that reduced the board to 11 members in 2008. The driver for this position may have been opposition to a significant levy increase the year before.
- Board reduction has not resulted in significant cost savings. The savings are pretty small in comparison to the overall budget.
- Board reduction has increased board member accountability and engagement. Members review materials ahead of time, are prepared for meetings, and are knowledgeable of the topics being discussed.
- Board reduction has not had a dramatic impact on increasing competitive elections. Most elections are uncontested. The only exception was the first election after the downsizing when incumbent supervisors had to run against each other.
- Board Chair believes 11 members is a little small, especially with one member who winters in Florida annually and when there was a board vacancy due to a death. Board recently affirmed that they wanted to stay at 11 members.
- Committees meet the week following the board meeting. Most of the Board's work is done at the committee level. Each committee has five members and several other Supervisors attend to learn more about the topics being discussed. It is common to have a quorum of the board attending committee meetings, which is publicly posted as such.
- Since most discussions and decisions happened at the committee level, board meetings tend to only last 15 minutes. The board members respect the work of the committee and most board agenda items pass unanimously. Some of the public may view this as the board "rubber-stamping" items, without knowing that items have been discussed at the committee level.
- County conducts a workshop for those interested in running as a county board member.
- County board and committee meetings occur during the day, which may be a contributing factor for a lack of younger members serving on the board. Members are retirees or self-employed.
- There are no term-limits for serving on a committee. There is a county ordinance that details process for assigning members to committees.
- Board members are reluctant to raise their own pay. Each member earns \$650 per month and the board chair earns \$1,200.
- Use the committee of the whole several times a year to provide education (e.g. open meetings and public records laws).
- When Walworth had an Executive Committee comprised like Washington's (made up of committee chairs), some members viewed it as a "Super Committee" and found it disenfranchising.
- SEWRPC conducted their last redistricting. Each board member represents ~10,000 residents.
- There has not been a concern regarding urban vs. rural representation. Currently, 7 members reside in towns and 4 reside in incorporated areas (City or Village).
- With 11 members, it is fairly easy to call special meetings.
- Board members do not discuss business outside of meetings, or e-mail each other.
- With 11 members, each knows each other and their ideals.

Slide 1



Washington County
EST. 1838
WISCONSIN

Washington County Board Structure Advisory Committee

Slide 2

Study Committee Members




- Will Symicek, Chair
- Chris Jenkins, Vice-Chair
- John Bulawa
- Frank Carr
- Don Kriefall
- Mark McCune
- Marilyn Merten
- Jeffrey Schleif
- Keith Stephan

Board Structure Advisory Committee

DISCOVER. CONNECT. PROSPER.

Policy Question:




What changes should be made to the structure of the Washington County Board of Supervisors as the 2020 census approaches, and the County transitions to a County Executive form of government?

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Why Now?



- Census 2020 and Redistricting
- Capture the experience of current board members
- Continuation of 2015 work- agreed to revisit board size and committee structure after several years of implementation

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Scope of Work:




- Determine County Board Size for 2022
- Establish Committee Structure for 2022
- Role and Responsibilities of County Board Chair
- County Board Staff Support

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Process Timeline:



- Met 4 times from October 14th to December 17th
- Redistricting Presentation
- Researched comparable counties
- Identified strengths & limitations of current board size & committee structure
- Guest presentations from WCA and Walworth County

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Timeline to Redistricting:

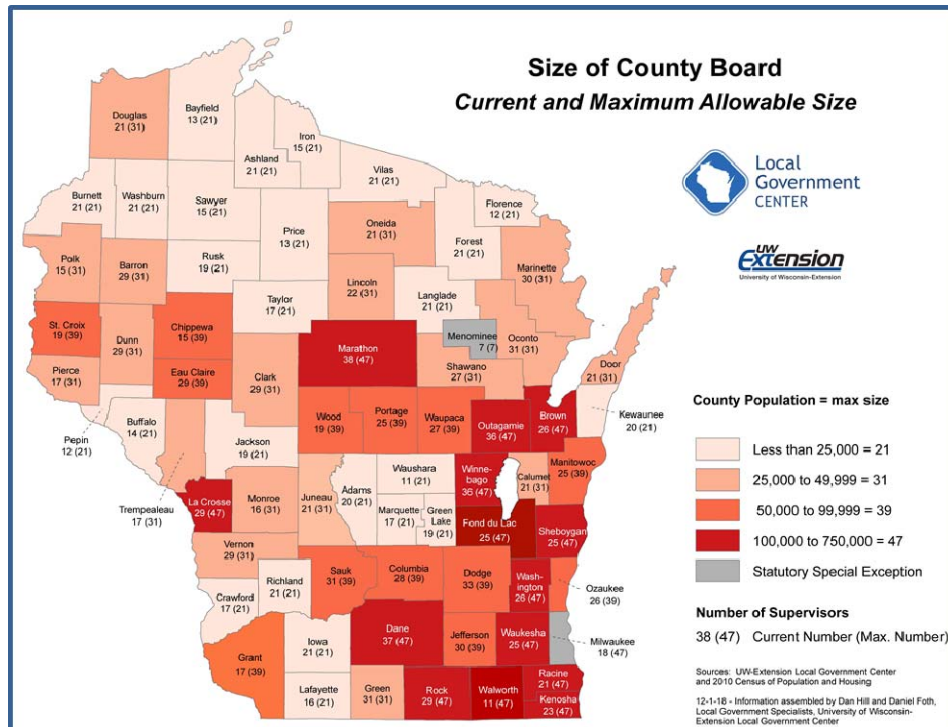
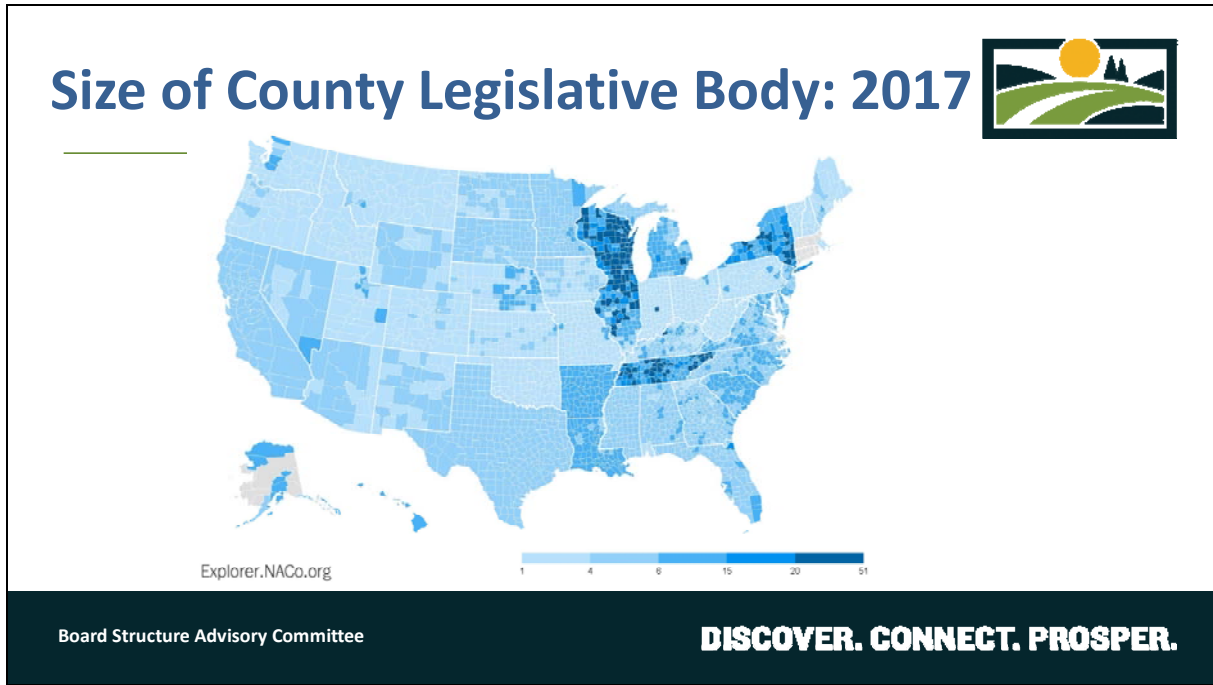


- April 1, 2020- Census Day
- April 1, 2021- Census Block Data Available
- April-May 2021- County Adopts Tentative Supervisory District Plan
- June-October 2021- Local Gov. Plans, County Public Hearing, and Submit Final Plan to State
- April 2022- Election with New Supervisory Districts


Redistricting Considerations:



- If you are going to reduce the size of the board, due it in conjunction with redistricting
- It is significantly easier to create fair districts that meet all constitutional, statutory, and county requirements
- In 2011, deviation between smallest and largest districts was 6%. In 2015, it was 21%.




Top 10 Counties by Population (excluding MKE)



County	2018 Population	County Supervisors	Constituents/Supervisor
Dane	530,519	37	14,338
Waukesha	401,446	25	16,058
Brown	260,616	26	10,024
Racine	196,200	21	9,343
Outagamie	184,541	36	5,126
Winnebago	170,025	36	4,723
Kenosha	168,700	23	7,335
Rock	160,349	29	5,529
Washington	135,970	26	5,230
Marathon	135,922	38	3,577
		Mean / Average	8,128 (Wash. Co. Pop/Avg. = 17)

Board Structure Advisory Committee **DISCOVER. CONNECT. PROSPER.**

WCA Data for all WI Counties:



- Board size ranges from 7-38
- Mean (average) = 22
- Mode (value occurs most often) = 21
- Median (middle value) = 21

Board Structure Advisory Committee **DISCOVER. CONNECT. PROSPER.**

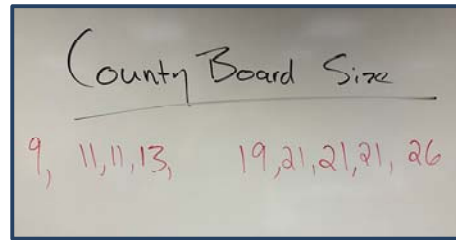
Study Committee Ballots:



Date	Ballot Response	Mean / Average
10/28/19	5, 11, 13, 15, 17, 17, 21, 27	16
11/15/19	9, 11, 11, 13, 19, 21, 21, 26	16
12/17/19	11, 11, 13, 13, 15, 15, 21, 21, 28	16



Board Structure Advisory Committee



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Three Data Points for Mean/Avg.



- Top 10 Counties (Excluding MKE) 17
- WCA Data 22 (21 for mode & median)
- Study Committee Ballots 16

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Recommendation for 21 Members:



- Broader support for a gradual reduction
 - Similar to the 2016 reduction of 30 to 26 board members.
- Unknowns related to the transition to a County Executive
- Reduce by 1 committee could mean 21 members
 - 4 committees with 5 members each + county board chair = 21.
- Divisible by 3, which makes it easier to determine voting for resolutions that require a two-thirds vote

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Next Steps:



- Reform Study Committee to:
 - Reaffirm Board Size
 - Establish Committee Structure
 - Role and Responsibilities of County Board Chair
 - County Board Staff Support
- Address Redistricting:
 - Part of Study Committee or form a Redistricting Committee
 - Decide on process- committee, staff, or SWERPC
 - Identify parameters

Board Structure Advisory Committee

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Appendix E: County Board Resolution:

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WASHINGTON COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Date of enactment: _____
Date of publication: _____

2019 RESOLUTION 58

Washington County Board of Supervisors – Board Size

WHEREAS, as part of the County’s strategic priority of a well governed and administered County, the County Board Chairman established a special committee (County Board Structure Advisory Committee) for the purposes of evaluating and making recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding county board size; and

WHEREAS, the County Board Structure Advisory Committee recommended a proposal for the Executive Committee’s consideration to reduce the number of Supervisory Districts from 26 districts to 21 districts; and

WHEREAS, the Executive Committee has reviewed the County Board Structure Advisory Committee’s proposal and recommends a reduction in Supervisory Districts from 26 districts to 21 districts to the County Board for consideration;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Washington County Board of Supervisors that 21 Supervisory Districts are created for implementation by the April 2022 election for the 2022-2024 County Board session.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that after completion of the 2020 census, the County Clerk shall prepare multiple plans for consideration, each comprised of 21 Supervisory Districts, consistent with the principles set forth in §59.10(3)(cm), Wis. Stats.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Executive Committee shall consider the plans prepared by the County Clerk and make a timely recommendation to the County Board.

VOTE REQUIREMENT FOR PASSAGE: Majority

RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Resolution reducing County Board size from 26 districts to 21 districts beginning with the 2022-2024 County Board session.

APPROVED: _____ Introduced by members of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE as filed with the County Clerk.

Bradley S. Stern, County Attorney

Dated _____

Considered _____ Donald A. Kriefall, Chairperson

Adopted _____

Ayes ___ Noes ___ Absent ___

Voice Vote _____

(A reduction of 5 County Board supervisors will generate some nominal savings due to reduced per diems and Board compensation. Based on current 2020 rates, savings is estimated at \$33,500.)