

# County Board Size and Redistricting



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.
  - Some 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.



To reduce or increase the size of the county board, **redistricting** has to occur.

# Redistricting

- ❖ Every 10 years with the federal census, governments are required to go through the redistricting process.
  - Will occur again following the 2020 census.
- ❖ **2005 Wisconsin Act 100** created a procedure:
  - Electors may initiate a reduction in county board size through a petition and referendum process.
- ❖ Under 2005 Act 100, the county board may reduce its size under its own initiative once during a ten (10)-year interim between regular rounds of redistricting.
- ❖ Reducing the size of the county board does nothing to reduce the statutory and constitutional mandates that are placed on counties.



# Things to Remember

## Redistricting

- Reapportionment and redistricting are mandated by federal and state law.
- Under Wisconsin statute 59.10, county governments in Wisconsin are required to redistrict following the federal decennial census (“decennial redistricting”).
- Section 59.10 also allows for redistricting one additional time in the period between decennial redistricting.
- Redistricting more than once every ten (10) years will require additional county resources.
- Redistricting is a very complex process.
- Redistricting must meet many legal requirements.
- Redistricting requires intergovernmental cooperation.
- Counties must determine early in the process the size of the board and appoint a redistricting committee.
- WCA is in the process of updating a county decennial redistricting handbook for 2021 which will be distributed to all counties.



# Things to Remember

## Redistricting

### Basic Procedure for Decennial Redistricting Under Wis. Stat. § 59.10(3).

**Step 1 - Adoption of A Tentative County Supervisory District Plan.** The county is required to adopt a tentative county supervisory plan within *sixty (60) days* after the results of the federal census (including the publication of maps showing the location and numbering of census blocks) become available from the federal government or are published by a state agency, but no later than July 1, 2021.

- propose a tentative county supervisory district plan establishing the number of supervisory districts proposed by the board and tentative boundaries for each district
  - hold a public hearing on the proposed plan; and
  - adopt a tentative plan.
- Anticipated timeline is April 2021 through May 2021



# Things to Remember

## Redistricting

### Step 2 – Creation of Wards/Adjustment of Ward Lines by Municipalities.

Upon receipt of the tentative plan and written statement regarding the creation of a ward, if any, from a county, a municipality has *sixty (60) days* to create wards or adjust its ward lines in accordance with the tentative county supervisory redistricting plan. A municipality is required to:

- Make a good faith effort to accommodate the tentative plan for the county or counties in which it is located; and
- To divide itself into wards in a way that permits the creation of supervisory districts that conform to the population requirements of the tentative plan.
- The municipal clerk is required to forward a copy of the ward plan to the county within five (5) days after the municipality has enacted or adopted an ordinance or resolution creating wards in accordance with the tentative supervisory redistricting plan.

Anticipated timeline is June 2021 through July 2021





# Things to Remember

## Redistricting

### Step 3 – Adoption of a Final County Supervisory District Plan.

- A county board is required to hold a public hearing and to adopt a final supervisory district plan within *sixty (60) days* after every municipality in the county adjusts its wards. The final plan must establish numbers for each district.
- Territory within each supervisory district created by the plan must be contiguous, except that one or more wards located within a city or village which is wholly surrounded by another city or water, or both, may be combined with one or more noncontiguous wards, or one or more wards consisting of island territory as defined in Wis. Stat. § 5.15(2)(f)3 may be combined with one or more noncontiguous wards within the same municipality, to form a supervisory district..
- The county board chair is required to file a certified copy of the final supervisor districting plan with the Secretary of State. Once the plan is enacted and filed with the Secretary of State, including any authorized amendment that is also enacted and filed, the plan remains in effect until it is superseded by a subsequent plan enacted under Wis. Stat. § 59.10 and a certified copy of that plan is filed with the Secretary of State.

Anticipated timeline is August 2021 through September 2021



# Things to Consider

## 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.





# Things to Consider

## 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.



# Things to Consider

## 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.



# Things to Consider

## 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.

# Common Misconceptions

Misconception	Truth
Smaller board size creates more competition for board seats.	Counties that have reduced their size in the past decade <b>have not</b> 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 <b>does not</b> 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.

# 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.

# 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.

# Recent Changes to Board Size



Thank you!

Questions?



Wisconsin Counties Association  
(866) 404-2700

