



Dates:



January 29
Statewide SWAT mtg.

February 25-26
Governmental Affairs
Leadership Conference

March 05-06
Rural Community
Economic Development
Conference

April 01
By this date, local gov-
ernment websites must
offer a two-way com-
munication option

April 14
Annual Town Meeting

Share a copy of
LINK with local
officials in your
county.

Did you know...

About 1,800
miles of
fiber-optic cable
are now in use
across Illinois.



Technology: Advancing communication with your public officials

New law requires internet opportunity for give-and-take

By Brenda Matherly

There's no denying it, the internet is the super highway for information, and now, more and more, for communication.

What was once a tool for broadcasting "one-way" information is now becoming an instrument for effective "two-way" communication. Whether you're making plans with friends for the weekend or communicating on a professional level, the public seems to have a desire to continue to improve on this style of communication. As a result, a recent amendment to the Local Records Act (50 ILCS 205/20), has your local units of government getting on board with

this trend.

Beginning January 1, 2015, a unit of local government, including school districts, that serves a population of less than 1,000,000 and maintains a website (other than a social media or social networking website) will be required by Public Act 098-0930 to post a two-way communication mechanism, such as a uniform single email address, on its website. The purpose of this new mandate is to allow members of the public to electronically communicate with elected officials.

The impact of Public Act 098-0930 will be to eliminate the existing one-

(See **Communication** on page 3)

Districts provided means to merge

Certain special purpose districts can dissolve into other units

By Kevin Rund

Legislation passed in 2014 (HB5785) allows for the elimination of certain special purpose local governmental units and local government offices through annexation, transfer of powers and dissolution. The powers and duties are not dissolved, only transferred.

The bill was signed into law and became immediately effective on August 8, 2014.

A major floor amendment in the House resulted in the language that had ultimately been passed into law, with one exception. A Senate committee amendment deleted reference to a provision in the Property Tax

(See **Consolidation** on page 4)

#FarmBureauLocal #LocalGovernment

Local experience influences perspective on local government involvement

By guest author DeAnne Bloomberg, FBCM, Manager, Rock Island County Farm Bureau®

Governor Rauner is now in office. He's dealing with state finances. But who's monitoring your county's finances? Several cfbs (county Farm Bureaus®) have been doing this for years. But there are several counties who are not.

Rock Island County's Governmental Affairs committee made a simple goal to attend each county board meeting 18 months ago. This is the most simple act of local involvement you can do. Show up, take notes, ask questions, and learn about local government. Is your county doing this? And are we sharing with our members—both farmer and associates—what Farm Bureau does to make an impact on local government decisions?"

Rock Island County Board members approved their 2015 \$73 million dollar budget that anticipates a \$1 million drawdown of its reserves. Five of the 25 board members opposed the negative budget. The general fund reserves have fallen from \$10.7 million in 2007 to approximately \$1 million this year.

A lot of issues are at play in the county. First, general revenues are down. For the 3rd straight year Rock Island County assessed valuation has declined. Beginning in 2011 we had \$2.95 billion in assessed valuation. Projected 2014 EAV is \$2.87 billion. That's

\$80 million less of assessed valuation. The budget is \$73 million.

Combine that revenue issue with other distractions.

The county nursing home is costing the county money every day it is open. The nursing home started with a \$2 million loan from the county at the beginning of the 2014. While the loan has decreased to \$700K, the county

**“Lots of distractions
have helped steer
energy away from
solving real issues.”**

board is trying to charge the county health department rent for their building.

The 245-bed facility is largely comprised of Medicaid residents. The county is subsidizing each Medicaid patient \$70 per day due to increasing bed taxes and less state funding. That's how they got to the deficit.

According to a report commissioned by the county, the cost of care per day for a resident at Hope Creek in 2012 was \$213, compared to an average of \$178 at 10 local competitors. Employee benefits made up \$38 of

that cost, compared to just \$18 at the other homes.

While there are serious financial issues going on, we're faced with some other diversions, too - the county board chairman was voted out, pressured out by his party chairman. The county courthouse and county office building have serious deferred maintenance issues. And then there's the downsizing of the county board from 25 to 15 members.

As you can see lots of distractions have helped steer energy away from solving real issues.

So how can a cfb impact positive change? Just have simple conversations with county board members about the need to make difficult decisions and to prioritize.

If there's anything that has become more apparent it is that governments can't be there for all people. We've got to prioritize. How many people say "I'm not getting involved with that mess." If we don't show up and participate - who will? And then where are we? We have county board members leaning on our input for decisions. They are coming to our county Farm Bureau board meetings now.

To take direction from the IFB Policy "playbook", a part of that Local Government policy

(See #Involvement on page 6)

Communication

(Continued from page 1)

way communication system (i.e., information a unit of local government disseminates to the public on its website), and establish two-way communication between the public and elected officials. This approach will allow the public an opportunity to more easily communicate questions, complaints, and compliments to those officials.

In order to follow the compliance requirements, units of local government including school districts have 90 days after January 1, 2015 to comply with the law. If the unit of local government does not have a website, there is no obligation to create one in order to comply. As I mentioned above, a social media or social networking website does not trigger the need to comply with this law.

If a unit of local government's or school district's elected official already has an existing individual email address which is

publicly available via its Internet website, no further action is required by this law.

While there is currently no requirement that an elected official formally respond to emails received from the public via the established email address, the unit of local government might want to consider developing a uniform response system. A uniform process may help to systematically review the handling and response of emails made by the public using the established email address.

What has not changed, is that those received emails and responses will generally be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[LINK](#)

“Gigabit City” – first in southern Illinois now connected

Carbondale looking to exploit new-found speed

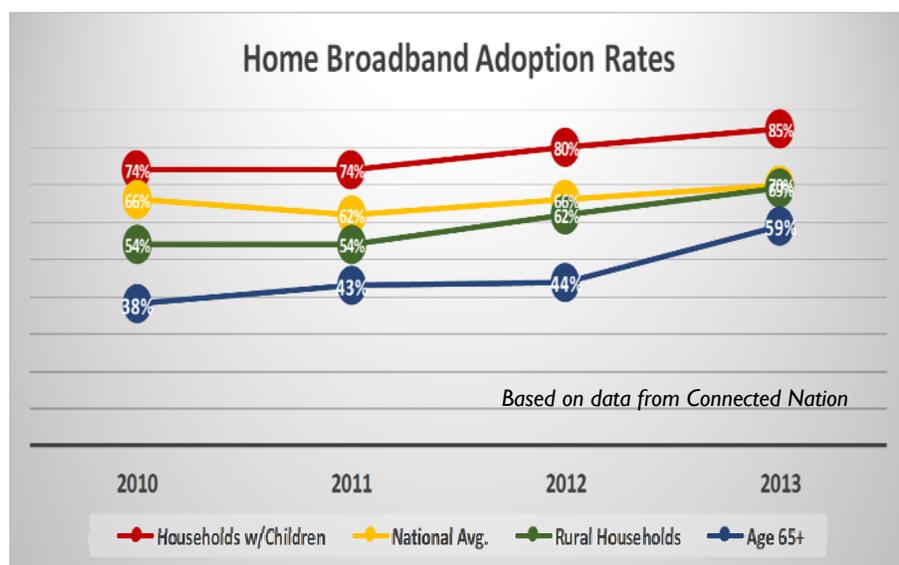
The first phase of a Next Generation internet network has been installed in Carbondale by Frontier Communications Corporation. The project relied on a state grant and partnering with the City of Carbondale, ConnectSI, the Partnership for a Connected Illinois, and Southern Illinois University (SIU).

The network offers internet speeds 50 times faster than otherwise available, making the community a “Gigabit City”.

The newly-available speeds—generally accessible by institutions such as hospitals, government agency offices and schools—will allow downloading a gigabit of data in seconds instead of minutes. That would allow storage of data in the Cloud, freeing up money from hardware and application costs. Its use in medical diagnostics could also boost the quality and availability of medical care.

Carbondale is planning to compete for a private-sector grant that would allow it to establish a downtown Wi-Fi system. These improvements will bolster the community's economic competitiveness and quality of life amenities for its citizens.

[LINK](#)



Consolidation

(Continued from page 1)

Code that allowed a multi-township assessment district to consolidate into the county in which the multi-township assessment district sits. That removal completed the purge of references to township offices from the final language.

Generally, the new law amends a number of Acts and Codes (see listing in box at right) to provide a method for transfer of the powers and duties of the special unit to another unit generally encompassing the same territory.

There are two major requirements that must be met to initiate that action. First, the board of the entity in question, created under those Acts and Codes, must vote in favor of the proposition to annex or consolidate. Secondly, the governing authority of the governmental unit assuming the functions of the former entity must agree by resolution to accept the functions (and jurisdiction over the territory, if applicable) of the consolidated or annexed entity. In both cases, a simple majority is required. If both entities vote affirmatively, then the entity in question shall—on the effective date—cease to exist.

On the date of the annexation or consolidation, all of the rights, powers, duties, assets, liabilities, indebtedness, obligations, bonding authority, tax-

Districts and Acts affected by dissolution provisions

- County Historical Museum District
- Cemetery Maintenance District Act
- Civic Center Code
- Public Health District
- Tuberculosis Sanitarium District
- Museum District Act
- Illinois International Port District Act
- Solid Waste Disposal District Act
- Street Light District Act
- Surface Water Protection District Act
- Water Service District Act
- Water Authorities Act
- Water Commission Act

ing authority, and responsibilities of the entity will be vested in and be assumed by the governmental unit assuming the former entity's functions.

It also provides for the rights of the employees. The governmental unit assuming the functions of the former district, commission or authority will exercise the rights and responsibilities of the former entity with respect to those employees. The status and rights of the employees of the former entity under any applicable contracts or collective bargaining agreements, historical representation rights under the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act, or under any pension, retirement, or annuity plan are

not affected by this amendatory Act.

Illinois Farm Bureau[®] policy (#116) would prefer such consolidations and dissolutions be approved by voter referendum. The new law, however, allows that process to proceed with only the approval of the governing boards. On that basis, we had opposed the legislation.

Language in our policy does entertain the concept of consolidation in several passages:

"We support the consolidation or combination of special taxing units or local government units and programs where such

consolidation or combinations are planned and approve by local initiative and referenda."

All of those provision are met by this law except for the calling of a referendum.

Another policy states: *"We support the principle of strong local government with the assignment of responsibility for government services to that unit of general government which best serves the people and can economically provide the service."* Though the verdict is still out on whether this new law will achieve those ideals, it has at least the seed of potential to do just that.

LINK

Annual town meeting – new rules will apply

Township voters have new options for the second Tuesday in April

by Kevin Rund

It's still three months away, but the April 14 date for the annual town meeting is preceded with deadlines and preparatory legwork that can't be ignored. In fact, voters need to be aware of a new advisory process available to them with a March 1 deadline—just six weeks out.

In 2014, the Illinois General Assembly legislated changes to the Township Code that impact actions at the annual town meeting through passage of Senate Bill 497.

The new law provides that notices of the annual town meeting and actions to be taken there now must be posted 15 days (formerly 10 days) before the township meeting. The same applies to certain notices that now must be posted 15 days (formerly 10 days) before a public hearing.

The change also provides that any group of 15 or more registered voters of the township may request an advisory opinion of public policy to be considered by the electors at the annual town meeting. They

must provide proper written notice to the township clerk not later than March 1 prior to the annual meeting. This is the same standard required for addition of an agenda item. If the advisory question is properly provided, it must then be published on the township board's agenda.

These provisions became immediately effective when the Governor signed the bill into law on June 18, 2014. (PA 98-0653)

Also new for 2015 is a provision included in Senate Bill 2980. This new law allows for the distribution of the annual financial report at the annual town meeting rather than reading it aloud. This is an option, not a mandate. (PA 98-1108)

Attendees will likely find that having the numbers in front of them in print will make the report easier to follow. They should still insist on verbal commentary on the report to aid in understanding.

On top of that, there are the myriad of other actions that may be conducted at the annual town meeting. We'll cover more of those in our next issue of LINK. In the meantime, if you'd like a preview, Google "Illinois powers of electors annual town meeting". You'll find a number of summaries and complete listings of those powers.

LINK

Improving Safety in Rural Illinois

There really is an app for that!

By Brenda Matherly

When you hear the expression, "there's an app for that," it's not likely you would associate that phrase with the ability to improve safety in rural areas. Hopefully this article will change that!

Google and iTunes recently released a new app that can be useful, if not lifesaving, in grain bin entrapments. Doesn't seem possible? Well, rural grain elevators, fire departments and other emergency personnel might disagree.

Smartphone Apps



The app, known as the *Illinois Grain Rescue Tube Locator*, uses a GPS system to locate the nearest grain rescue tube. Locating a nearby tube could make all the difference in a situation where a rural farm worker is trapped in a grain-

filled storage bin.

With more than 900 grain-bin entrapments nationwide in the past 50 years (10 grain entrapments in 2010 in Illinois alone), the Illinois Corn Marketing Board, together with the Grain

(See **App** on page 6)

GALC – highlighting local issues

On February 25-26, 2015, Illinois Farm Bureau® will hold its annual Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference (GALC) at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield, Illinois.

Over 400 Farm Bureau leaders from across the state attend this conference to receive information and training regarding our key public policy issues.

These two days will feature dynamic speakers, information, and training sessions. Farm Bureau leaders will have an opportunity to keep up with current issues and network with agency representatives and elected officials.

GALC will offer three general sessions, a legislative update,

and four breakout sessions—each offering five separate workshops.

If you are interested in local government issues, you won't want to miss these workshops:

- *Effective and Efficient Local Government*
- *Zoning: What Happens If You Don't Have County Zoning?*
- *Farmland Assessment Values: What to Expect in 2015*
- *Local Preparedness*

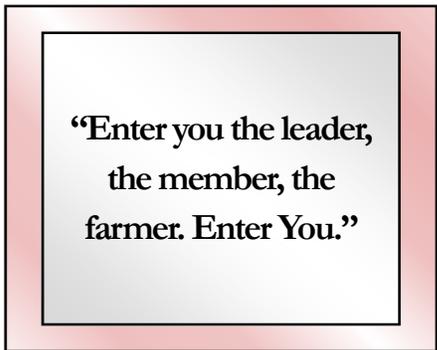
Reserve your place at this conference! To register, you may contact your county Farm Bureau manager, or visit our website at www.ilfb.org.

LINK

#Involvement

(Continued from page 2)

says, *"We Support: Efforts by local government officials, county Farm Bureaus and other organizations to increase public participation in the overall functions of local government."* That language is hard to find but worth the read. Personally this is one of the easiest ways



for Farm Bureau to make a local impact. Something as simple as showing up is considered participation.

For years, Farm Bureau has been in the business of providing good direction based on understanding the state statutes, thanks to our qualified staff. We've been representing rural viewpoints in the past, don't underestimate our largest asset - critical decision makers who know how to do more with less. Enter you the leader, the member, the farmer. Enter You.

#FarmBureauLocal
#FarmBureauLessisMore
#RaisetheBar

LINK

App

(Continued from page 5)

and Feed Association of Illinois felt the need to build this app to save lives and help build awareness of the dangers lurking inside these bins.

Technology certainly has its benefits, and making rural areas a safer place to live and farm is a benefit beyond value. In this case however, the app is free, so all farmers, rural residents and emergency



Overhead view shows rescuers training with a Grain Rescue Tube in a bin designed for the exercise.

responders should have this downloaded and be familiar with its use.

LINK