

Politics/Mayor suspects some dual officials driven by money

• From A-1

officials differed on whether it should be abandoned or converted into a future recreational site.

Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt, who served as a county supervisor before crossing over to city government, is a staunch critic of dual representation.

Schmitt said he was considering proposing state legislation to prohibit politicians from holding more than one local elected office simultaneously.

The mayor said he suspects some dual officials are driven by the oldest motive: money. Serving on the County Board brings a salary of \$7,800 a year, while those on the Green Bay City Council collect another \$9,887 a year. The arrangement not only allows conflicts of interest, he said, it also hampers government's ability to conduct business.

"There needs to be partnerships with different levels of government," he said. "But I also think you need to pick a side."

Supporters of the dual role arrangement disagree, saying that it fosters more intergovernmental cooperation while allowing dedicated public servants to make a more significant contribution.

Supervisor Bill Clancy, who also serves as Holland's town clerk, said he sees no conflict. Dual representation gives him a better handle on the needs of Holland residents on both local and county issues, he said.

When the county wanted to place a new landfill in Holland, Clancy sided with local opponents and opposed his county colleagues. The two sides in 1998 reached a negotiated settlement that allowed the county to move forward with its plan.

The landfill dispute was "not a happy time," Clancy said. But he believes that serving as both town clerk and county supervisor enables him to manage the town's local concerns as well as the county's broader agenda.

"You're answerable to a lot of people," he said, "for either little issues or big issues."

The dual role tradition became institutionalized in 1965 when Green Bay city leaders decided that they could create greater

DOUBLE DUTY

A roster of elected officials who hold two offices simultaneously.

	COUNTY OFFICE	SALARY	LOCAL OFFICE	SALARY
PATRICK BUCKLEY	Supervisor	\$7,800	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887
BILL CLANCY	Supervisor	\$7,800	Holland town clerk	\$6,700
NORBERT DANTINNE JR.	Supervisor	\$7,800	Humboldt town chairman	\$9,150
TOM DEWANE	Supervisor	\$7,800	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887
DAN HAEFS	Supervisor	\$7,800	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887
DAVE KASTER	Supervisor	\$7,800	Bellevue village trustee	\$6,515
THOMAS LUND	Supervisor	\$7,800	Suamico village trustee	\$5,500
ANDY NICHOLSON	Supervisor	\$7,800	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887
TONY THEISEN	Supervisor	\$7,800	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887
VICKY VAN VONDEREN	Supervisor	\$7,800	Rockland town supervisor	\$5,150
GUY ZIMA	Chairman	\$11,249	Green Bay alderman	\$9,887

regional coordination if the city's aldermen automatically represented Green Bay on the County Board. Districts were drawn so that aldermanic boundaries overlapped with county supervisor boundaries.

Henceforth, voters would fill both positions automatically with a single vote.

Paul Janquart, a longtime Green Bay city clerk starting in the 1970s, recalled that Green Bay in those days loomed larger in county politics, with a population that constituted 50 percent of the county — compared with about 40 percent today.

"It was always the assumption that what was in the city's interests was in the county's interests," Janquart said.

Many surrounding towns and villages, too, began sending local elected officials to represent them in county affairs.

Brown County leaders filed suit in 1981 to abolish the practice, on the grounds that it created conflicts of interest and that it deprived voters of "undivided allegiance" from their elected representatives. But a judge threw out the suit, ruling that there was nothing in the state Constitution to prohibit dual elected officials.

A similar tradition took hold in Marathon County, where Wausau City Council members automatically became county supervisors. Officials are unsure why Green Bay and Wausau embraced dual representation more — or longer — than other Wisconsin cities.

After the practice was abolished in Wausau in 1988, momentum built in Green Bay to do the same. Some officials here discussed letting voters decide the matter in a

referendum. But after the 1990 census and county-wide redistricting, Green Bay aldermen voted in August 1991 to repeal systematic dual representation once and for all.

Mark Blozinski, the alderman who led the final successful push, said several colleagues were unhappy with him because, he said, they no longer would automatically collect two salaries for winning one election.

"It was kind of like double-dipping," he said.

Blozinski, who served in a dual role himself from 1988 to 1991, said he opposed the practice because of the conflicts of interest and the unmanageable workload that came from holding two offices. In addition, he said, dual representation confused many voters, some of whom seemed unaware that city and county government were separate.

Although he has been out of politics since 1992, Blozinski now agrees with Schmitt that Wisconsin should prohibit anyone from holding two offices simultaneously.

"I just don't think it's really right," he said.

Schmitt said he would decide early next year whether to push for state legislation to ban the practice.

State Rep. Chad Weininger, R-Ashwaubenon, a former Green Bay city clerk, said he knows the issue has been a ticklish one in the community for many years. But while he would gladly consider any legislative request, Weininger said he would hesitate to introduce a bill that could be perceived as taking away voters' rights to elect candidates of their choosing.

"At the end of the day, it's really up to the voters," he said.

Local elections next April will include all Green Bay aldermanic seats and all Brown County supervisor seats.

Although no longer mandated locally, dual representation is still permitted — and still commonplace.

In addition to Clancy, Zima and five other current Green Bay aldermen, voters have installed dual role officials in Bellevue, Humboldt, Suamico and Rockland.

Zima, who has held two offices for more than 30 years and currently is the

County Board chairman, said the potential for a conflict of interest never occurred to him until the Oct. 18 debate about city-county negotiations. At issue was a proposed landfill deal that would continue county control of trash collection in Green Bay for the next 10 years. Some city officials think they could save taxpayers money by pursuing other waste-disposal methods.

Zima said he has since decided that no conflict exists for county supervisors to be involved in the city's closed-door deliberations on the unresolved issue.

"You have to do what's best for the community as a whole," he said, adding that having aldermen on the County Board has likewise given the city "clout" on other issues.

Civic leaders voiced mixed opinions on the dual role matter.

David Nelson, a one-time Green Bay alderman now active in the Brown County Taxpayers Association, said he supports the concept because it creates elected officials who have a deeper understanding of public business.

"One person has it all in his head," Nelson said.

But the potential for conflict concerns Joyce McCollum, president of the League of Women Voters of Greater Green Bay.

McCollum said she sus-

VIDEO

Go to this story at www.greenbaypressgazette.com to watch a video of the Oct. 18 debate among Green Bay City Council members about dual representation.

pects that if the city and county have different interests on a particular

issue, some dual role representatives would have to abstain from any involvement in the decision-making process.

"It's a tough issue," she said. "The question is: Who are they really representing?"

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