



Editorial: May 10, 2019

## COMPLETE CONSOLIDATION BY REPEAL OF CITY CHARTER

By Paul H. Benoist

The recent Stennis Institute public forum on Mississippi municipal government forms reconfirms that changing Natchez city government form or replacing city elected officials will not cure area problems. Stennis says, “any of the forms of government can be effective” depending on elected officials’ behavior; however, our city government’s lack of basic competencies, irresponsible spending, and failure to manage city contractors, property, and departments compounds our population decline and local economy problems. We are beyond the study stage. Radical changes now for our area are a must. It is inconceivable that city elected officials will give up power or positions, take reduced salaries and by-pass excessive travel perks, or give complete authority to a City Manager for administration, personnel, and money matters. Don’t expect city elected officials to combine all services with the county. That would further expose city elected officials as unnecessary and irrelevant.

Service consolidation attempts locally have mostly failed, with annual infighting between city and county officials. Visit “City Failures” at [www.OneBoardnatchezadams.com](http://www.OneBoardnatchezadams.com) for a list of what we have all endured just in these past 34 months—city leaders who thumb noses at employees, taxpayers, and laws—most recently state law on routine maintenance of minute books, unindexed since 2016 but for 366 pages. OneBoard believes critical time and money are now being wasted with talk of prolonging the life of Natchez city government. This will simply further compound problems and endanger the needed reboot.

The turning point in the recent forum came when Sue Wiltz, with a long and distinguished public service career elsewhere, asked about local government consolidation—a common subject across the country for areas with declining populations and economies. Stennis professors informed Sue that she could raise her question later this month when University of Georgia speakers discuss consolidation—presumably consolidated government form(s) permitted in Georgia. I look forward to hearing their presentation; however, unlike Georgia, Mississippi does not allow consolidated local governments.

To be clear, OneBoard is not about trying to consolidate the governments of the city and the county. Mississippi counsel tells us Mississippi does not permit it. If both city and county government exist, they must be separate. Each Mississippi county’s Board of Supervisors is required and protected under the Mississippi Constitution, whereas Mississippi municipalities are strictly optional and charters can be repealed. OneBoard is in favor of forced consolidation via City charter repeal. All local government functions would be run by the Board of Supervisors, which has in place a County Administrator administering and managing all services and operations. City government goes away under the OneBoard initiative. “Natchez,” to identify our community name, remains. The Board of Supervisors can establish an economic development area for the Natchez bluff/tourism/entertainment area. Legislation can address tax diversion so our area receives sales and other taxes it collects. City funding like “casino money” goes to the county. See illustrative list online under “City Failures”



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described above. Only property owners within former city boundaries pay off former city debt. Yes, legislative tweaks would be made for separate political subdivisions, like Natchez Convention Promotion Commission.

All of this leads us to expect that, for the Georgia presentation to be relevant for our area, it should focus on Mississippi processes to consolidate all of our local government functions under the Board of Supervisors. We also know that besides city charter repeal, “forced consolidation” can also occur incrementally through neighborhood withdrawals from the city. OneBoard’s initiative—dissolution of city government through legislative repeal of the obsolete city charter is the quickest, most direct path to saving this area, resulting in default by

operation of law to the Board of Supervisors. It also means that our area will then have “all eyes on 5” Supervisors elected to the Adams County Board of Supervisors and no more blame game between the local governmental entities.

OneBoard supporters are bi-partisan, of all races and ages, investors, business owners, employers, and white, pink, and blue collar workers, property owners, aspiring property owners and ex pats forced to leave for economic reasons. Sign the petition to save our area through consolidation of all local government functions. Go to [www.OneBoardNatchezAdams.com](http://www.OneBoardNatchezAdams.com) for the online petition and information, or pick up petitions at 329 Market Street downtown.

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