

**Tama/Benton County Empowerment Merger Board**  
**Minutes of Meeting: April 15, 2010**  
**Windsor Manor, 9:00 a.m.**

**Present:** Richard Arp-Tama County, Jodie Betterton-Benton County, Ron Buch-Chair (Board of Supervisors) Benton County, Nancy Farmer-Benton County, Joyce Legg-Tama County, Jenn Stover-Tama County and Larry Vest-Chair (Board of Supervisors) Tama County. **Absent:** Kathy Koehn-Benton County. **Others Present:** Lori Johnson-Tama County and Heidi Schminke-Benton County.

1. **Call To Order:** Ron Buch called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
2. **Overview of Tama County/Benton County Board:** Lori gave an overview of the two counties, a copy of which was included in the meeting packet and is attached to these minutes. She stated that the letter of intent needed to be complete by September 1<sup>st</sup>. This letter should include minutes from forums, meetings etc. which discuss the possibility of a merger, justification for the request and documentation describing how the boundary change will improve efficiencies. She noted that single county areas with less than 5,000 were required to merge. There are no requirements on number of children for a multi-county area. Some in the group expressed concern that perhaps merging with more than one other county would be proactive to avoid having to go through this process again in a few years. Discussion was held on some of the drawbacks of getting too big - mainly the increased travel for volunteer board members to attend meetings. The group also compared involvement with the local school districts. Both counties have districts that overlap into other counties which has provided some challenges in the past, but both have good working relationships with the schools and keep communication open. Lori and Heidi will work together to create a letter of intent to be approved by the boards, should it be determined that a boundary change would be in the best interest of each area. This will be made available at each counties May meeting.
3. **Merger Guide:** The merger guide was provided to all in attendance. The group reviewed the guidelines and will utilize this tool as we move forward.
4. **Ground Rules:** The ground rules for merging were briefly reviewed by the group. The intent of this process is to remain open minded and continue to move forward.
5. **History of Areas:** The original application for empowerment designation was submitted as a four county area including Tama, Benton, Iowa and Poweshiek which coincided with the DCAT area at that time. This application was submitted twice and declined twice by the state.
6. **Review of Timeline:** Originally the counties that were required to have a boundary change had until July 2012 to merge. It was recently brought to the attention of the coordinators that the deadline was changed to July 2011. The two boards will meet separately in May to vote on the consideration to merge and become an empowerment area. Assuming both boards approve the merge the subcommittee will meet in June to proceed with the details to make the merger successful.
7. **Considerations:** The two counties have similar size population and the demographics are also. Keeping the boundary change smaller will make it easier to be more equitable and easier to manage. It was also noted that Empowerment areas have a funding base of \$30,000 which would be reduced significantly for each extra county included in the boundary change. Allocating the funds fairly was also discussed. The group felt that it would be best to be done by percentage looking at past funding for each county. Benton County is currently a 501C3. If the merger takes place the area would reapply to continue as a 501C3 which would allow for opportunities to apply for grants. Discussion was held on who the fiscal agent would be. The group felt it would be fair to bid the opportunity out to the two current fiscal agents and select from the bids received. Who signs of on the bills will also have to be determined. The group discussed having one governing board to make major decisions with subcommittees from each area that would meet on opposite months. It was suggested that we take advantage of technical assistance from the state. It was noted that the state is also going through restructuring and technical assistance might not always be accessible. The state is also recommending a new

Levels of Excellence for each area. Certain standards must be met in order to attain a higher status which might allow for incentives.

8. **Other Business:** The group reviewed the draft copy of coordinator responsibilities. Discussion was held on if both staff would attend meetings in both counties. It was determined that during the transition period it would be beneficial and the need could be readdressed at a later time. Discussion items for the next meeting will include but not be limited to identifying priorities and how we arrive at them, budget cuts, by-laws, board representation and continuity of current membership.
9. **Public Comments:** There was no public comment.
10. **Adjourn:** Richard Arp moved and Nancy Farmer seconded that the meeting adjourn. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will be held at 9:00 a.m. on June 2, 2010 in Traer.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Schminke  
Empowerment Coordinator