

# ILLINOIS MUNICIPAL

# Review

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MUNICIPALITIES

JANUARY 1977



## YORKVILLE -

### "GOT ITSELF TOGETHER" WITH TOWN MEETING "76"

By: LeROY E. THANEPOHN  
Mayor, City of Yorkville

Yorkville is a changing rural community in the heavily industrialized Fox River Valley. It is located approximately 50 miles west of the Chicago loop, and 10 miles south of Aurora.

The city is being affected by the urbanizing spread. There are presently about 3000 residents. The anticipated growth has slowed with the economy. However, it is still projected to double in the next ten years and then double again in the following ten years.

It has been said of the City of Yorkville that we have the best planned community in the best planned county in the State of Illinois.

We have a growing industrial park as well as other developing industries. There is one of the finest local shopping centers in the area, as well as the successful downtown shopping area. The city is served by one U.S. highway and three state highways. The Burlington Northern supplies a freight line. Airport facilities are available 10 miles north or at O'Hare Field 40 miles away.

The city has a great deal of annexed land waiting to be developed, and the annexability capabilities are tremendous.

In Yorkville, we held a Town Meeting "76" to let the people put forth the challenges as they saw them. Then, also, for the people of Yorkville to make proposals to deal with these challenges.

This exercise in democracy was an extremely rewarding experience for all of the participants and for the community. The Illinois Department of Local Governmental Affairs put out a briefing on the Town Meeting program early in 1976. It was from that briefing that we sought further information. The program is put together by the Institute of Cultural Affairs.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs is a non-profit organization which researches community life and social organization, and which is committed to economic and social renewal in communities. The Institute of Cultural Affairs believes that true community development depends on local citizens. The Institute has developed well tested methods of problem solving, teamwork, and motivation. The Town Meeting demonstrates to the people of any community that they can make a difference by involving themselves in civic affairs.

There was some initial doubt that our citizens would participate in the numbers necessary for a good consensus. This was not a politically sponsored meeting at all, but was a grass roots effort.

It grew from one interested local leader, to a nucleus of 8 or 10. Then in an amazing response, a total of 30 organizations and churches backed the project. Never before had anyone seen such cooperation. The press picked up that enthusiasm, and by the day of the Town Meeting great anticipation was prevailing.

The meeting ran from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. There was a welcoming program with Federal, State and local officials on hand. There were some patriotic songs and then that whole group of about 250 people got down to work. They were split into smaller groups, and brainstormed various areas in three main categories, Economic, Political and Cultural. There was even a group that wrote a new song for the community, and a brief history. The support by all of those organizations was so great that no fee was charged, even for the chicken dinner. The challenges were all determined in the morning sessions. The

Institute of Cultural Affairs certainly does have a very structured, effective and extremely well planned program. After determining the challenges, they were distilled by the groups into commonalities. The lunch was served on time. Local entertainment was provided. Lunch ended on time. Then, all these people once again split into small groups to find their solutions to the problems or challenges presented in the morning sessions.

It was a tremendous experience. So many fresh, new ideas to solve old, stale problems. It was an exhilarating time for me as Mayor to listen to these discussions.

The afternoon then was spent again brainstorming, finding solutions and offering proposals with which to deal with given problems.

At the same time as this adult program was taking place, a childrens Town Meeting was also taking place nearby. The childrens town meeting followed a similar course and they all enjoyed their day also, and were sorry to see it end.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs has held 500 or more town meetings across the country with an impressive record of success. They are geared up to do some 4500 more in the next couple of years.

The benefits to our community have been great and are continuing.

The cooperation of so many lifted the morale of the entire community. The Town Meeting itself made people aware of the love, concern, and problems of their neighbors and friends.

The very tangible result will go on indefinitely. It has been but 5 months since our town meeting. In that time a Human Resource Bank has been established. This is a bank of willing citizens who have talents and resources that they are willing to share with other people, who for one reason or another may be in need. This may be crisis care or a retired teacher willing to tutor a child in need of help, or a young couple in dire financial condition through inexperience or mishandling. Also the Resource Bank has someone talented in handling finances, and willing to show them how, or a little old lady who needs help with storm windows who cannot afford help, and the Human Resource Bank

has someone willing to help. There are many, many applications in bringing together problems and resources.

The first city newsletter will have gone out on December 1st with information of city activities and articles of public interest. This was another recommendation of the Town Meeting "76" meeting. The newsletters are of the people, by the people and for the people.

Other proposals, all either presently being worked on, or slated to be are: to promote public education; an effort to encourage patronization of local business, which in turn supports the community; propose a "Good government organization"; promote accountability sessions or quarterly workshops with local officials; promote a park district. In fact, as a result, it now appears a park program is developing. Also there was a proposal for a Community Day — a city wide social. There was a great feeling of togetherness at the town meeting, and it has carried over these months. Another proposal was for the Board of Education to make sociology instruction with community involvement required for all students, and also to make these courses available for adults.

Many other proposals were developed, all of which makes the community richer and more of a cohesive citizenry, more sensitive to the needs of others, and more aware of their civic responsibilities.

The great thing about most of these proposals is that they do not cost any money, yet the community benefit is great.

I highly endorse the Town Meeting concept and the specific program that the Institute of Cultural Affairs has put together. The Institute supplies a nucleus to train local citizens who then draw out the comments and handle the discussions. Institute people do not try to inject ideas or thoughts into the process. The end result is a truly local consensus.

We found all of the Institute people to be very effective, enthusiastic, and of very fine character. For interested communities, the address of the Institute is: Institute of Cultural Affairs, 410 South Trumbull, Chicago, Illinois 60624.