

From The Chair – March 2019

‘Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.’

That quote attributed to Warren Buffett aptly describes part of the role of a county supervisor in Iowa: looking ahead to the future and assuring that this place we call ‘Home’ will still be here generations from now, and will continue to thrive.

Ask five different people to interpret the role of County Supervisor in Iowa and you may very well get five different answers. However, Iowa Code stipulates that the County Board of Supervisors is the executive branch of county government. Fayette County’s three-member Board of Supervisors serve as the policymakers for the county and administer various county programs. As defined in Iowa Code Chapter 331, Supervisors’ powers include:

- reviewing budget requests
- appropriating funds
- establishing county tax levies
- enacting ordinances
- filling employee vacancies

and hearing reports from county officers. The board is also responsible for overseeing economic development in the county.

Fayette County is a member of Iowa State Association of County Supervisors (ISACS) which recently offered this description of a county supervisor’s duty: “to protect and preserve the rights, privileges and property of the county or of its residents and to preserve and improve the peace, safety, health, welfare, comfort and convenience of its residents.”

Typically, that doesn’t mean micro-managing, interfering with or dictating the day-to-day business of elected and appointed officials in Fayette County. It does however, suggest we provide leadership, and on occasion may assist in working out challenges departments may face as a result of changes in law, or unfunded mandates, as two examples. We are also tasked with fixing rules relating to the use of county buildings and grounds and approving on a bi-weekly basis, the claims sought of the county.

ISACS suggests county supervisors should have a knowledge of: agriculture and conservation, budgeting, business management and finance, collective bargaining, the court system, drainage districts, elections, human services, libraries, planning, zoning and public safety, public health, secondary roads and bridges and supervision of personnel.

Admittedly, few people elected to the role of supervisor come into the seat with experience in every one of these areas, but it does help to have a varied background and then be willing to learn as you go. While some of the above categories require our involvement on a weekly or monthly basis, others may only come before us on occasion or even on an annual basis. Whether a county is served by a three or five-member board is NOT designated by population or geographic size – but rather, the will of the people who live there.

I think I can speak for all three of your board members when I say that we are proud to serve you in county government. If you have a concern/suggestion/idea for a specific department, we encourage you to approach that department head first. Then if you feel the need to express your concern further, give one of us a call.