



Local officials learn more about vote centers

13 HOURS AGO • [STAN MADDUX TIMES CORRESPONDENT](#)

LAPORTE | Lake, Porter and LaPorte county officials heard the pros and cons of consolidating polling places into vote centers on Thursday from Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson.

Among the 20 people in attendance was Porter County Clerk Karen Martin, who was in favor of vote centers.

"In the long run, I think the cost savings might be to our advantage," she said.

Lake County Clerk Michael Brown took a more neutral stance but wanted to know more about vote centers due to the success of the six early voting locations in the county since 2010.

"We have made some effort to make voting convenient for the voters. That's not to say we've closed the door on this but we need to see what our options are," Brown said.

Lawson said the decision to switch to vote centers is up to each county with the county commissioners and county council having to adopt resolutions for vote centers to be utilized in their respective counties.

Under Indiana law, Lawson said there would have to be at least one vote center for every 10,000 active voters in a county.

That means fewer vote centers than polling places, which are located in each precinct and a savings in ways such as not having to hire as many poll workers, she said.

Lawson said fewer locations to vote also means more convenience for voters who could vote at any vote center in the county if, for example, their place of employment was close to a vote center and they wanted to stop there to and from work.

"There's no wrong place to vote," she said.

Martin said she feels there also would be less confusion because voters would probably be more familiar with the locations of vote centers as opposed to having to know the exact precinct to go to cast a ballot, which could increase turnout.

Lawson said counties would have to make a likely small investment in purchasing an electronic poll book, which would be connected through the internet from vote centers to the voter registration data at the county clerk's offices so voters could sign in to vote at any location in the county.

Other potential costs would come from having to purchase new computer equipment and educating voters about vote center locations through advertising and other methods.

However, she said there would be a savings over the long term.

It costs each county on the average \$100,000 to run an election, she said.

Currently, vote centers are used in Tippecanoe, Vanderburgh, Switzerland, Wayne, Cass, Blackford and Johnson counties.

Floyd County will be going to vote centers in 2014.

Lawson said LaPorte was the ninth out of 13 locations in her series of stops to strictly educate election officials about the option.

"We are not pressuring anybody to make a decision yay or nay," she said.