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Ok, the truth is that this
is political mail.
But there is still some
interesting information in it.

**A government
that cares.**

**A government
that works.**

ABE FORSYTH

SANGAMON COUNTY BOARD – DISTRICT 27

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SANGAMON COUNTY BOARD NEWSLETTER

FALL 2024



I've spent the past several months walking door to door through District 27, meeting with many of you to discuss the issues that matter most. It's been rewarding to hear your thoughts and concerns, and I'm sending this second newsletter to answer some of your questions and keep you updated.

What can you tell me about Sheriff Paula Crouch?

Sheriff Jack Campbell's decision to retire was, I think, a final and fitting act to a career marked by modernizing his office and devotion to public safety. I believe he felt that his retirement was the best step toward restoring community calm after the tragic killing of Sonya Massey. His early announcement allowed us some time to prepare a process for finding a replacement. I (we) recruited a committee of diverse and distinguished citizens, chaired by former Chief Circuit Judge Patrick Kelley and including former State Representative Raymond Poe, and former Democratic candidate for Sheriff Chico Bell, to review 15 applications, conduct interviews, and make recommendations. I believe that they found us an outstanding new Sheriff.

Paula Crouch has served in virtually every role involved in local policing, from dispatcher to beat patrol, to community police officer, to undercover agent, to Crime Stoppers coordinator to detective to supervisor. It's worth emphasizing that during her career, Paula worked intensively with residents of Springfield's east side community and wrote her master's thesis on improving minority and female recruiting in law enforcement. Our new Sheriff is also a lifelong resident of Sangamon County, having lived in Springfield, Loami, Auburn, Chatham, and now Sherman/Williamsville, where she and her husband, Bob, are raising two fine boys.

There's something else I particularly like about Paula's background. She knows that life sometimes knocks you down. She's suffered and obtained compensation for sexual harassment. She's faced financial difficulties. She's had the police enter her home when



a neighbor's dog harmed her family pet. She understands that justice is the application of human understanding to the laws designed to protect all of us from the worst of us.



What's the status of the Transportation Center?

Wellllllllllll, we have our fingers crossed that the federal funding we need to complete the project will come through in the next 30 days. If it does, we are ready to begin work roughly sixty days after we get this last piece of the funding.

The Sangamon Mass Transit District (SMTD) bus transfer facility will be completed this month and is already in operation. Directly north (across Washington Street), The Sangamon Menard Area Regional Transportation (SMART) offices will be under construction early next year. I've included a drawing so that you can see what it will look like.

What is the Massey Commission?

I believe that the community-wide response to the inhumanity of former deputy Sean Grayson's killing of Sonya Massey was revulsion and a universal desire to **do something** to ensure this never happens again in our community. Everyone wants to **do something** to prevent a recurrence, but the question is, **what should we do?**

The purpose of the Massey Commission is to find out what we should do by bringing the entire community together to review what happened, research best practices and develop concrete recommendations.

The commission is based on successful efforts in other communities (most notably Ferguson, Missouri) that have suffered similar trauma. To optimize its effectiveness, the commission must seek broad community involvement, conduct itself in a totally transparent manner, seek the advice of a variety of experts, survey best practices across the nation (and perhaps the world), and build a consensus around solutions.

This last point, consensus, is the key which the other operating principles are designed to support. Everyone wants to make improvements to the delivery of services particularly to our underserved community. We want to move quickly to consensus-built solutions that can be swiftly implemented.

The commission is giving itself a year to make final recommendations with the potential for interim recommendations along the way. I am optimistic that the spirit of goodwill can overcome the temptation of political division and lead to permanent, positive change. Some of the changes can be achieved at the local level. Some may involve changes to state statutes. I believe that the Massey Commission will succeed if it maintains and builds on the broad community consensus about getting something done.

Why doesn't the County Board just make all these changes?

The first answer to this reasonable question is that the county board doesn't have that power. The county board is not like the state legislature that can make laws, subject to the Governor's veto, which the governor must enforce. It's not even like a local school board that can, in fact, establish local policy and direct the superintendent to implement it. County government is different. The county board is not a miniature state legislature that makes laws for the county. Except in very limited areas like speed limits or operational hours for bars, the state legislature enacts most local laws.

When setting up county government, the State of Illinois seemed to be thinking "any damned fool can get himself elected to the county board (you may think I'm proof of that) but if you can get elected to county-wide office you are more likely to have enough sense to run that office." State statutes and case law are very clear that countywide elected officials set the policies and procedures for their office (Sheriff, Clerk, Treasurer, Coroner, Recorder, Prosecutor, etc). The county board's role is to supply the tax money necessary to run the office.

So, if the county board supplies the money to run all the county offices, you might think it could control the county offices by withholding money the way we see the state legislature or the US Congress act from time to time. But case law is clear that county boards must supply sufficient funds for each office to operate or face a court order to do so.

All of this analysis begs the question: Do part time county board members have the expertise to tell full time elected officials (some with required professional degrees and training) how to run their offices?

This isn't to say that the county board is powerless. But its power is largely a "positive" power. It has the ability to supply taxpayer funds to support new initiatives and changes, but implementing these changes depends on the skill and good will of the countywide elected official. The board can also withhold funds for new initiatives that don't seem to make sense. And it can question current expenditures, but withholding funding is subject to court review.

The Massey Commission is a good example. The county board will supply funding to the Commission. The Commission will gather professional expertise and survey best practices. Most importantly the commission will, we hope, build on the community wide consensus for improvement with its recommendations which both the board and our new Sheriff have pledged to work to implement. The experience of other communities has demonstrated that the Commission is important to engage wide-ranging participation and build this critical consensus.

Are Sangamon County Deputies underpaid?

I think the compensation package for Sangamon County deputies is competitive, but let me share the facts and you be the judge.

First, I need to explain that, in Sangamon County, older deputies who started before January 24, 2014 (Group 1 employees) have a different pay schedule than deputies who started work after that date in 2014 (Group 2 employees). We negotiated this second pay scale when the Group 1 pay scale consistently exceed the statewide comparisons. Gradually, the group 1 employees will retire and the entire department will operate from the Group 2 scale.

Here's a comparison of our pay scale with comparable counties:

	Champaign	Macon	McLean	Peoria	Rock Island	Tazewell	Avg.	SCSO (1)	SCSO (2)
Starting	$64,064	$58,042	$65,255	$60,704	$56,160	$55,660	$59,981	$67,247	$59,715
Year 2	$68,307	$68,235	$68,750	$65,277	$60,890	$72,190	$67,275	$68,486	$60,812
Year 3	$68,307	$71,976	$70,338	$67,878	$63,370	$73,633	$69,250	$70,216	$62,351
Year 4	$68,307	$74,463	$71,927	$71,887	$65,244	$75,106	$71,156	$72,409	$64,296
Year 5	$75,483	$74,463	$73,692	$74,540	$69,211	$76,608	$74,000	$75,399	$66,953
Year 6	$75,483	$75,892	$77,660	$78,248	$69,211	$78,140	$75,772	$79,923	$70,970
Year 11	$85,987	$79,134	$84,369	$94,411	$73,178	$84,582	$83,610	$85,955	$76,326
Year 16	$91,166	$84,844	$89,491	$97,974	$77,145	$87,119	$87,957	$92,741	$82,352
Year 21	$92,581	$87,684	$95,933	$97,974	$83,095	$88,861	$91,021	$101,035	$89,717

If you eyeball through this chart, you will see that sometimes we are a bit higher, and sometimes we are a bit lower, but generally, we are in the ballpark of all of our similar-situated counties in the state.

Earlier this year, the City of Springfield adopted a new pay scale for its police department. The new scale increased compensation by about 19% on average and is about 20% higher than most comparable cities (Decatur, Rock Island, Champaign but comparable to Bloomington). The chart on the right shows a comparison of the deputy compensation in the Sheriff's office to the police pay scale for the City of Springfield.

Sangamon County deputy compensation in the Sheriff's office to the police pay scale for the City of Springfield.

	SCSO (1)	SCSO (2)	SPD
Starting	$67,247	$59,715	$80,763
Year 2	$68,486	$60,812	$85,514
Year 3	$70,216	$62,351	$90,265
Year 4	$72,409	$64,296	$95,016
Year 5	$75,399	$66,953	$95,016
Year 6	$79,923	$70,970	$96,916
Year 11	$85,955	$76,326	$101,667
Year 16	$92,741	$82,352	$103,567
Year 21	$101,035	$89,717	$108,318

These differentials are a little narrower for county deputies with longer service but across the board the differences are substantial. However, there are other aspects of total compensation that when balanced improve the comparison.

The comparison of benefits for the county officers versus the city officers.

Allowance	Work Day	Clothing Fund	Pension Contribution	Pension Security (Funded at)	Social Security Eligible
County	9 hrs	$460	7.5%	98.6%	YES
City	12 hrs	none	9.91%	53.6%	No

Different people will weigh these benefit differentials differently, but I think a rational person, considering daily lifestyle and long-term benefits, could reasonably choose to work as a county deputy instead of a Springfield policeman, and, fortunately, 65 people have made that decision. It is important to remember that the city's police contract only recently took effect; over the life of the contract, we expect these direct compensation differences to narrow.

Are too many people dying in the county jail?

One death in the jail is too many. The truth is that jail is a very unhappy place with very unhappy customers. I think that even the most liberal partisan would agree that, after the passage of the SAFE-T Act, the people in jail now are most likely to be the worst of the worst. You might be surprised to learn that even after the passage of the SAFE-T Act, at any given time, approximately half the jail population is undergoing treatment for psychological disorders. All of the inmates who have died in the jail in recent years have exhibited symptoms of serious mental or physical health problems (smearing their own feces on the walls, eating and swallowing non-food items, attempting suicide). Extreme irrationality poses additional difficulties in caring for people in the jail's custody.

In the face of these challenges, former Sheriff Campbell, with the full financial support of the County Board, implemented a number of changes:

- Tripled the Qualified Mental Health Service hours (from 28 to 80 weekly). ($262,000)
- Implement round-the-clock RN Nursing Services ($66,000)
- Upgraded from a combination of LPN and RN services to exclusively RN providers (371,000)
- Updated Jail Cameras and DVR system (cost of $450,000)
- Added Body Worn Camera equipment for all corrections officers. One of the first jails to do so in the State of Illinois. (cost $284,000)
- Added a sophisticated inmate scanner to the booking process to scan (thoroughly but less intrusively) for contraband including drugs, weapons, etc. to ensure these items were not coming into the Jail (cost $150,000)
- Partnered with the Family Guidance Center and the Gateway Foundation to provide in-house counseling and substance abuse treatment, discharge planning and post release treatment.
- Provided Alchoholics Anonymous treatment twice weekly.

More recently the Jail has:

- Provided Mental Health Counseling for Anger Management and Domestic Violence.
- Partnered with Faith Coalition to meet with released inmates to provide re-entry materials and community resource guides.
- Upgraded and codified jail policies and procedures to national standards through the Lexipol system (cost $110,000 and ongoing).

It's a little difficult to get accurate comparable data on deaths in jails from other similar counties but the best data I could develop looks like this:

Deaths in the Jail (Last 15 Years)

Peoria	5
Macon	3
Champaign	5
Tazewell	3
SANGAMON	**4**

Many inmates present at the jail are in horrific mental or physical health. No death in the jail is acceptable. But I think this comparable data provides some context for understanding the realities of what our jail staff must deal with every day.

With all this attention to help jail inmates is the county continuing to invest in law enforcement to help catch and incarcerate really bad guys?

Yes. This month, we will open the new Evidence Storage Facility, which is an important component of keeping convicted criminals in prison while they appeal. As part of this construction, we will also cut the ribbon on a new facility to store tactical equipment for the Sheriff's office. This new combined facility cost $5.7 million and took two years to construct in a portion of the old State Journal-Register building, saving county taxpayers almost $1,000,000 from the original plan for a separate stand-alone facility.

The new Coroner's facility, ***complete with a state-of-the-art forensic autopsy lab***, should also reach completion this year. The new facility will provide a comforting environment for the families of the victims of criminal violence and the best of modern tools for conducting thorough and conclusive autopsies. This facility, too, was built with $5 million of Federal ARPA Funds and for about $1 million less than the stand-alone facility we had originally planned before we purchased the SJ-R building. When completed, Sangamon's Forensic Facility will service our entire region as far south as Madison County. We have carefully calibrated our fees to ensure that Sangamon County taxpayers will not be subsidizing services to other counties.

Are we making progress in the effort to reduce Homelessness?

We are making progress with a comprehensive approach to reducing homelessness in our community. Four years ago, just as COVID was descending upon us, Sangamon County joined with Capitol Township, the City of Springfield, the Hospitals, the United Way, and the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln to study best practices in other communities. The result of that study, an organization called Heartland Housed, has brought real structure and cohesion to a process long staffed by dedicated but overwhelmed volunteers from many local agencies. As a result of these efforts:

1. The County was able to refurbish an unused portion of the Juvenile Detention facility (using ARPA funds) for Helping Hands to use as the critical transition link from homelessness to housing. The goal of an adequately sized, professional facility had eluded the community for more than 30 years.
2. We are now scoring in the highest percentile of communities nationwide on the federal government's assessment of local community's re-housing organizations.
3. As a result of our improving scores. We have increased federal funding by almost 25%, and we were ready, willing, and able to use over $1,000,000 in state funding when it became available.

The numbers really demonstrate our progress:

94 people in our community moved from Homelessness to a house in 2019 (before the launch of Heartland Housed).

388 homeless individuals accounted for in our annual February 2024 Assessment.

245 people moved from homelessness to housing in 2023.

366 moved from homelessness to housing so far in 2024

This problem never goes away completely. New people become homeless as we help others back into housing. But we are, now, actively working to prevent homelessness and assist those who lose their homes. The system is working, we are making progress and people are beginning to remark on the reduction of homelessness in our community.

What worries you the most about County Government?

Inflation. Here's the dirty little secret about government: Almost every year the government's revenue increases even if the government doesn't raise the tax rate. Why is that? Because the value of your property goes up. The higher the value of your property the more tax the government collects. (You can see this in your tax bill.) At least in part government needs this additional revenue because the costs of operating government rises every year with inflation (higher salaries, higher fuel costs, etc). But what happens if inflation pushes up government costs faster than the rise in property values in Sangamon County? If that happens, government will ask to raise the tax rate to bring in more revenue to match expenses. But Sangamon County can't do that, at least it can't do that easily, because Sangamon County Government tax revenue is capped and cannot rise by more than 5% no matter what inflation does to the costs to operating government.

We have two defenses against this problem. The first defense is to create and enforce a culture at the county that constantly seeks more efficient, less expensive ways to deliver services. The second defense is to create a culture in the community that favors growth and opportunity. When new businesses come to town or existing businesses make new investments, these investments increase property tax values and generate more government revenue without asking existing taxpayers to pay more. **This is why Sangamon County so strongly supports the work of the Springfield/Sangamon Growth Alliance (contributing $500,000 annually) and why we are so excited about the announcement of new projects, such as the new Frito-Lay distribution center to be built between Chatham and Springfield.** We need to see more of this if we want a stable and prosperous future for our families, and I believe the Growth Alliance is on the cusp of announcing a series of new projects with equal or greater impact.

Out of 102 Counties, Sangamon County Ranked

#1 in Illinois for **Best Government for your Tax Dollar**

#5 Best County to Live in Illinois

#9 Healthiest County in Illinois



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Thank you

This second letter is based on the many conversations I've had while walking the district and connecting with so many of you. It's been an honor to serve District 27, and I'm eager to continue working on your behalf. We've made significant strides on issues like local business growth and public safety, which are key to our district's success. I've listened to your concerns and am committed to ensuring our community's needs are met. I hope I've earned your trust, and I ask for your vote to continue serving District 27. Thank you for your support!

Abe Forsyth

Paid for by the Sangamon County Board Republican Election Committee.

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