

# THE PLAIN DEALER

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## **An Ohio budget to usher in leaner local government: editorial**

By The Plain Dealer Editorial Board

Gov. John Kasich's first budget is a signal to every local government official in Ohio -- and to the taxpayers they serve -- that this is a new era. Call it an age of austerity. Or of simple realism.

You don't have to agree with Kasich on everything -- and the budget certainly misfires on some things, notably aid to public schools -- to know he's right about one thing: Local governments, libraries and school districts need to change. They need to get leaner and smarter. Some must streamline operations through mergers.

Kasich's spending plan delivers this message with a hammer. He wants to take away about half the Local Government Fund that sends cash to counties and municipalities. He wants to reduce payments to libraries and school districts. Even if the General Assembly tweaks the governor's plan, its broad outlines probably will remain intact.

Kasich's caution that local governments refrain from raising taxes is not particularly realistic given the size of the hammer blow, and Ohio's traditional -- albeit, traditionally shortsighted -- reliance on local taxes. But Kasich's aim is true: to force local governments to change the way they operate.

It's a goal Ohio's fractured localities must embrace.

The private sector has been undergoing an often painful structural transformation for decades. Companies have used technology to drive efficiency. They constantly re-evaluate what they do and how they do it.

Governments, on the other hand, too often behave as if it's still 1960 -- or will be, once tax receipts rebound.

During the first part of the 20th century, when Greater Cleveland's population and wealth were soaring, governments proliferated. Cuyahoga County now has 59 municipalities and 31 school districts. Voters tolerated redundancy to enjoy autonomy. They could afford it.

Not anymore. For the past decade, smart mayors and city managers have been looking to shave costs by trimming employees and joining with neighbors to buy supplies in bulk. The day Kasich unveiled his budget, five mayors in eastern Cuyahoga County agreed to create a joint SWAT unit and explore sharing other specialized units.

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