

Cumberland County Charter Commission
12/4/08 Organizational Meeting

District 1: Kathleen Babeu, John Eder, Rep. Meredith Burgess
District 2: Claude Morgan, Neil Jamieson, Commr. Richard Feeney
District 3: Steve Gorden, David Lunt, Lisa Villa (Harrison Selectperson)

Present: Peter Crichton, Esther Clenott, Malory Shaughnessy (late), Elizabeth Trice

History: This group was selected by voters in November 2008, in addition, commissioners are required by law to appoint the other three. Knox and Aroostook both have charters, Androscoggin and Somerset are currently considering it. Tonight's goal are primarily organizational.

John Eder suggests having an interim chair until the group knows each other better. Steve Gordon suggests appointing who had the most popular votes as chair. Motion by David Lunt to appoint Claude Morgan as interim chair, Lisa seconds motion. Neil Jamieson agrees. Vote for Claude Morgan Interim Chair.
Passed unanimously.

Claude Morgan suggests Roberts Rules be rules of order, seconded by Steve Gordon.
Passed unanimously.

Group agrees that as elected officials, all will complete FOIA course.
*County will send link to group.

Meeting Schedule:

Thursdays at 4pm are agreed to be a good time, acknowledging that meetings may be difficult for Meredith as it would be for any state legislator. Meredith suggests that sometime she might be able to phone in at times. Some work will be done in subcommittee meetings. Agreed to start with once month, the first week of the month. Group agrees that although state law suggests having first public hearing within 30 days of organizational meeting, that this is impractical with the holidays approaching, so will hold it the week after instead.

Next Meeting: Thursday January 8th 4-6pm Feeney Room

1st Public Hearing: Thursday, Jan 15th 4-6pm

- County will reserve Feeney Room
- County will put ad for hearing will be put in local papers and on website.
- John Eder will check on good locations for public hearing

Commissioner Shaughnessy arrives.

Timeline:

Commission is required to submit preliminary report within 9 months or ask for extension. Possibility of aiming for the 2010 November election. 2010 is also the county's 250th anniversary. Commissioners can create an extension for up to 24 months. Group agrees to start work and ask for extension if one is needed.

Dick Feeney has provided minutes from Knox County Charter Commission to group.

Claude: Was there info from the failed 1984 process, exit polling?

Eder: The legislature took up the issue, and gave counties the right to start a commission without going to voters. The large task at hand is making a substantial connection with voters. The biggest question that came up talking to voters this fall was "what is county government" We should really try to make an inclusive process, asking the voters what they envision for a regional government. . .we could unveil this as a new day, and this could take time.

Public Hearing and Constituencies

Commission members expressed interest in who the county stakeholders and constituencies are and what they think: of the services the county provides, what percentage of citizens take advantage of them? What services that we don't provide that they wish we would pick up? There has not been a formal inventory of all the various constituencies that each County Department serves or formal public survey of voter opinion of the county. Some see constituencies as municipalities, others as all taxpayers, others as all voters or residents or users of individual departments. Cmmr Shaughnessy states that constituencies are all people who live, work and do business in Cumberland County. The one step removed is that they don't see any direct information from County. For example, residents don't pay a tax bill directly to county. The town gathers the tax and pays it to us, so the towns feel that they are the constituents. Agreed that many residents know little about county government, and group expresses interest in doing poll at election time, through omnibus surveys given annually by phone, and/or doing educational outreach activities. It is suggested that the public hearings, particularly early ones, might take this angle: "What is county government about? Come find out" Eder suggests putting together a public relations committee and offers to meet with county before next meeting to start planning for first public hearing. Agreed that first public hearing should be televised and have educational focus. A copy of tape can be distributed to local cable channels and contact information included at end of tape. The county doesn't have free access to public access, we have to pay. Eder is a producer at CTN, so will check on what is possible.

County will handle press releases and notices of public meetings, but rarely do many people from public show up to county hearings, so suggestions are welcome. Maybe put a subcommittee together that could go on a tour of public access stations.

Requested Topics for Future Meetings

- Summary of experience from Knox County Rep. * Dick will invite for Jan 8
- History of county government- Herb Adams? * Dick will invite to Jan 15
- Commissioners and County manager can talk to us about long-range challenges.
*Jan 15

- Department Tours: ask “what barriers are there to you doing your job in the best way possible? What changes would help you perform your duties? Finding out who are constituencies/customers are, and how to communicate with them,
- Hear from some of county government’s detractors, e.g. Richard Moore in who worked to abolish county government in Massachusetts.
- Basic grounding in law and the theory of home rule- ask Orlando Delogue.
- Glossary of terms
- Possibly doing some polling, possibly farming out to polling firms. Couple this information with outreach.

Resources

State Law requires the county to reserve \$500 for Charter Commission. Knox county provided \$10,000 and the proposed budget for the 2003 process was \$15,000. Part of this could go to pay Pat Dunn, the county’s legal counsel. County will determine soon.

Discussion on Role of County:

Neil: Maybe we haven’t been acting in a way that’s in the best interests of the county for a long time. We need to consolidate services, let county govt’ be a stronger player, but towns don’t like to give up part of their services even if it would benefit their citizens from a tax point of view. This is where we’re headed. How can we make county govt’ efficient for everyone?

Peter: we’ve had two 5-year strategic plans: 2001, 2006. The 2006 one was more visionary, and much more of an outreach effort. What we are saying as a county government, and commissioners have provided leadership on this is that we are a convener, facilitator, service provider. . .we are trying to work in partnership with municipalities , for example, we have convened a group to discuss doing tax assessing regionally – not that the county would be the service provider – but how can we do this better? We’re having successes like the Community Development Program. Sometimes our role is just bringing people together.

Eder: Two efforts to win voter approval for charter have failed. We may come up against territorial effort from towns, I think the contact to voters is all the more important.

County G has been gov’t to govts. How can we get message directly to people so that they can push their municipalities in the direction we want them to go? Towns will be understandably threatened. We really need to speak to voters and get them interested.

Lisa: It’s important to not say that there is a territorial issue, and work hand in hand with towns. Many towns have joined the county dispatch. Times have changed and we need to have an open mind. If we can provide high quality and affordable services, many towns will want to work with the county.

Steve Gordon: The other side of this is an analysis of county programs- are there some that should be passed off to state? This provides good transparency to public, lets them know that county is not just gathering power.

Esther: more likely the state is passing services down to local government.

There are thousands of people who know about probate and deeds and EMA, but they don’t put it into a whole. One the contrary, you have all the towns who know very well what are departments, but they’re so mad about their annual tax bill they don’t think about it. There’s dichotomy between municipal leaders and citizens. Part of our job is to

bring the two together and let them know that each department is a whole package of services. Then we'll have an army behind us – people are not our enemies.

Burgess: I'm not sure I would say it's the county charter commission's mission to solve a huge public relations problem- it's the job of the county commissioners.

Eder: It's a good question whether we want to take on the task of educating and communicating with voter. As the commission, we do have to have to take the task of shepherding the charter through passage.

Malory: Agrees that there's a much larger piece of work that the county needs to do and the charter commission is a piece of it. Agrees that it would be good to have group look at services and discuss what level of government would handle it best. When you shop, you need to go to BJ's for high volume- that's like the state, then the little local store- that's like the town, then there's a supermarket- that's like the county - there's some economy of scale, but not so much as the state.

Claude will copy two possible timelines and distribute at next meeting.

Group establishes that email is suitable for communication between group, but to remember that that emails between elected officials are public property.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55pm.