

Cumberland County Charter Workshop Community Television Network in Portland, January 15, 2009

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

Present: Peter Crichton, Elizabeth Trice

Minutes approval will be moved to the next meeting

Guest Speaker: Herb Adams District 119 Representative, Author, Maine Historian

When speaking recently to a group of children at Reiche Elementary school, he asked them what they thought government should be, and they replied: “Handy, Thrifty, Nifty”

History:

Towns created in Maine: Popham 1607, Brunswick 1628, Old Falmouth (Cape Elizabeth) 1632, York County was once all of Maine. Massachusetts found Maine to be a contrary and a self governing contrary type of people.

Duke of Cumberland for which Cumberland is named crushed Bonny Prince Charlie and snuffed out Catholicism and is the reason Queen Elizabeth now sits on the throne. York, Cumberland and Lincoln (after the county in England not the President) were the first three counties.

New counties were carved between 1776 – 1854. Each county followed geographical markers to define its border. County seat (shiretown) was located in the center of an area that a man could travel in one day. Boundaries changed frequently

Counties provided repositories for Land deeds, probate/estate records. (Probate judges were the only elected officials.) County court house is where you went for justice.

Do counties have a function today?

This new era has its own challenges. Boundaries are now interpreted politically. Today the old idea is reversed. Now counties distribute information and services outward rather than drawing people to the center to receive services. Sheriff is now added to the original 3 functions. The functions are extraordinarily important, in addition to providing the important and necessary social services.

There have been attempts to shrink and grow Cumberland County. Cumberland’s definition of itself has been in flux. A Charter Commission can be used to determine the direction of the County and how it defines itself.

Does County have a function?

A county is necessary due to the need to disperse much needed services at the sub-state level. It costs \$3 billion to run the state. The largest portion of that is education (K-12), second is DHS.

Together they equal 80 percent of the budget. Some form of participatory government is the needed to make changes and disperse social services. Some cost savings can also be afforded to the individual towns through uniform billing services and bulk purchasing etc.

What is your take on the previous two failures of the Charter Commission?

The voters had not defined for themselves the importance of a governance document and neither had they identified with that middle layer of government to make it worth to be fixed. IN general, citizens need for services happen very rarely: upon the purchase of a property, death of a loved one, or crime- possible only once or twice in a lifetime. However, their need for justice (ie Sheriff) is something that you could utilize.

How can we fill the gap between the waning need for the “shiretown” and the electronic dispersal of information?

We can mail tax assessment notices, each Town could create them; the county could send them out and be the central collection agency. The state is looking at undertaking the responsibility of the County jails, but the State could assume the cost of the drugs for the prisoners (psychotropic drugs). Registry of Deeds actually turns money over to the County, where this function used to be performed at the Town level. It is important to identify the burdens of the Towns which could be done more effectively (with the Town’s blessing) at the County level.

Are there any vestigial positions among the elected positions?

County Judge positions are part of the State Constitution. You could make some of the elected positions appointed instead by another body. Cumberland needs more commissioners. It has only three and covers from Pownal to Portland. A case could be made for 5 to 7 instead. However, the voters tend to err on the side of less government despite the inherent benefit of a possible more locally informed commissioner.

Are there any County services that could be shifted to the State?

The State would like to take over the county jails and it would be a good thing to do to prove that it can be done. It would be pricey. However, the State’s buying power for the psychotropic drugs and assuming the retirement costs of the employees of the jail system would be a benefit.

One suggestion might be for (by county wide vote) each county to establish a meals and lodging tax. Not town vs. town. It should be Countywide (revenue share) to make it worthwhile for all towns to participate. This is a revenue stream virtually untapped. 1 cent on the Maine sales tax equals \$128 Million.

What about county to county or county to federal government?

Centralize purchasing on the county level is a benefit. However, some people want local control even when you can prove that money can be saved.

Do you see the county having a relationship to other entities including districts?

It is hard enough to get people to identify with the county as an important entity to the benefit of their lives – other districts might be more difficult.

Speaker: Peter Crichton, County Manager

1. Collaboration

- a. Municipalities
- b. Businesses
- c. Citizens
- d. Non-Profits
- 2. Community Building
 - a. Ensure preservation of Communities
 - b. Community Development program
 - i. Only one in New England
 - c. 26 participants
- 3. Continuous Improvement
 - a. Through 5 year strategic plans
- 4. Emergency Communications
 - a. 1999 – seven employees
 - b. 2009
 - i. 6,000 sq. ft
 - ii. 25 employees
 - iii. Board of Directors
 - iv. Savings over the previous communities expenditures
- 5. Now looking at regional tax assessing
 - a. Open process- not necessarily county would provide service
 - b. Inequity in the existing system
- 6. New Partnerships?
 - a. Providing for back office operations of the schools
 - i. Human resources
 - ii. IT
 - iii. Special needs
 - b. 21 school districts, 45,000 students at a cost of \$500 million = 10K per student
 - i. national average \$5-6K
 - c. Could be a special district rather than a countywide

Discussion: Public Relations – guidance for John Eder and Claude Morgan

- 1. Create process that includes input from both residents and municipalities
- 2. Attitude:
 - a. We don't need to know everything before starting
 - b. We should leave open the entire spectrum of possibility from dissolution of county government to re-envisioning and growing county government
- 3. How to begin the conversations
 - a. Web-site- should be independent, but can use pages on county site
 - b. Copies of televising go to each town
 - c. Public hearings attended by media moderators
 - d. Individual responsibility of charter comm. Members to meet with local and legislative leaders
 - e. Committee to see to the individual town outreach
 - i. An outline of the direction of the meeting for every town meeting
 - ii. Pairing of county officials with charter committee members for meetings is an option that remains open to venue and scheduling.

- 1. Importance of balancing collaboration with county officials and independence of charter commission at the same time
- iii. A committee to determine which entities might be the best audiences
- iv. Budget to be determined
 - 1. hire a facilitator?
 - 2. funding in the county budget
 - 3. recording secretary?
 - 4. reasonable compensation for travel
 - a. federal guidelines
 - b. rotate meeting sites

- 1. Which communities voted down the previous charter commission? Dick Feeney will get.
 - a. Lack of understanding of what it was about

A link from town websites and county website

- i. Announcing of meetings etc.
- b. County charter web-page is included on County web-site (CumberlandCounty.org)click on county government and then county initiatives for Charter Commission news.
 - i. Drop box could be created with little effort
 - ii. Have towns link to the County web-site
 - 1. Recorded meetings are being sent to individual community TV stations but not always played- charter commission members may want to take more active role in asking their local station to play tapes.

Next Meeting - first Thursday of each month :

Thurs Feb 5. 4-6pm, - County Courthouse, Feeney Conference Room.

Thurs March 5, 4-6 pm, Location TBA

Thurs April 2, 4-6 pm, Location TBA

Thurs May 7, 4-6pm, Location TBA