

090923Minutes

Charter Commission Public meeting

Attendance: Claude Morgan, Lisa Villa, Steve Gorden, David Lunt, John Eder,

Commissioners: Shaughnessey, Cloutier, Feeney

Staff: Peter Crichton, Bill Whitten, Elizabeth Trice

Unanimous approval of minutes.

Decision to create “Friends of Charter Commission PAC” - unanimous (Motion: Gordon, Villa),

Commissioners express their respect and appreciation for work of charter commission.

Workshop:

Wild ideas from Jim Cloutier:

Recommends taking an additional year – shooting for November 2011 election.

Cloutier was the president of GPCOG for years. Served for 10 years on regional waste organization, helped create EcoMaine., was member of Casco Bay Estuary Project, Wayside Soup Kitchen, knows a lot about how regional operations are able to deliver services. COG has tried to be a positive force finding ways to deliver more effective government services. Now there are a number of municipal groups, a series of oddly-formed educational groupings. If you looked at Maine local gov’t 30 years ago, you would say this is proverbial transportation device designed by committee- random, and has become more so in the last 30 years. When he was leaving the City Council, was putting together what was required by clean water act.

What the voters of this area would like are far ahead of what the local governmental and school officials are. School officials have to be very careful to not make mistakes.

I encourage you to think: should we now be thinking about county government as a general purpose government as opposed to what is happening now.

Peter has taken a page from consensus- building book and found ways that county can leverage its expertise and resources to benefit municipalities. It will continue to happen.

But core municipal responsibilities are public works, education, economic development.

I do believe there is a much more positive outcome that could come from regional approach to education, plowing streets, economic development. Benefits from economies of scale. A government solution can be more effective and economical than contracting sometimes. I urge you to give that some consideration. There are a lot of people in southern maine that would want a government that could do that and not be tied to municipal government.

Morgan: do you feel that language would promote language that would promote the type of government you are talking about?

Cloutier: No. It doesn’t recommend to public a general purpose government.

Shaughnessey: It opens the door wider, but doesn’t step through.

Cloutier: the way its written now would be a transitional step to something else, but it isn’t that thing yet. Many people believe that there must be a regional solution that is more effective and/or less expensive. Ecomaine has saved lots of money and is on the forefront of the eco movement in United States.

Lunt: How much interplay have you had with folks like me that are “outlanders”? The fine line that I see us going is collaborations and that kind of thing because you get out into some of the smaller towns and if you talk about regionalizing and “blending” that’s a good way to get driving out of town. I’ve been working to develop a document that can lead to collaboration. A sneaky way to get through the door.

Cloutier: with Ecomaine we had to get the assent of all members including Harrison, Bridgton. RWS didn’t have a good PR system for the first 20 years. Each town thought they were getting screwed. But when good information came out it turned around.

I call it subtle, not sneaky. Half a mile is good, but I think the voters are ready for a mile.

Shaughnessey: the long-term vision I had coming from the Midwest was services provided over the region. We have come along the path to see that some things work better across region. Likes vision of county being able to provide services. Think we need to shift our dollars there. That’s where we’re heading eventually. This charter draft doesn’t step through that door, but not sure if some of the smaller towns are ready to go there. Has seen small towns come into dispatch and seen how effective that is.

After excise tax this November we may be having a whole different conversation.

Cloutier: even if you want to present a half loaf to voters I think its still worth talking about the whole loaf.

Lunt: Thinks governor and legislature made mistake with school consolidation – we already have 16 counties in place, would have been much better.

Shaughnessey: agrees. We now have 8 public health districts along county lines. There’s Federal public health money we don’t get because we don’t have large enough local health departments.

Cloutier: talk to police chiefs, special education directors, dispatch – rtp, metro all have dispatch systems. There’s a lot of good will – people of all ilks can work together. If you give them the bit, they’ll pull the wagon. The one thing I always thought despite heroic efforts of Donny Carroll who does rescue coordination – it’s shameful that our rescue situation from town to town- your likelihood to survive an event depends on what border you’re near. Not all areas have fully equipped emergency responder within minutes. Everyone deserves a high level of service.

Cloutier: no particular issues with draft, will send comments, this is a document he can get behind.

Shaughnessey: Budget Authority 5.3 It’s important that commissioners have final authority and can act if BAC doesn’t.

Morgan: We need to make that clearer, would welcome clarifying language.

Has vision of seeing a city-county health department. Right now Portland is shouldering the burden because they have the staff.

Lunt: our local health officer is our code enforcement officer, and would be ill equipped in the event of an emergency.

Shaughnessey: when state did audit, they found that many health officers didn’t know they had that responsibility. This is a mandate by the state – thinks region would be better served by 3 health officer employees.

Gorden: The charter is set in stone, hard to change. Next is bylaws – there are steps to change, but not as difficult. Last is administrative policies and those are least restrictive. Charter is held hostage by history. We tried to write it so that if the positions ever become

redundant, they can be changed. Pictures that administrative codes would include the departmental organization.

Shaughnessey: Thinks its right to keep framework open so that you don't have to got back t voters. Likes flexibility of 3.1 rather than setting number of commissioners.

Villa: District 3 has more towns. How does that effect job of commissioner?

Shaughnessey: I have 15 towns. It's harder. I don't know all the municipal officials.

Thinks having more commissioners would be a good thing. Outer communities get a lot of services, but don't have the personal connection.

Villa: I'm concerned about using population to determine number of commissioners.

Shaughnessey: With 80,000 people to 2 commissioners, that would be about right. Thinks 40,000 to a commissioner would be about right.

Cloutier: thinks civic center should not be independent board.

Morgan: we've discussed this, have had legal counsel, and decided to take a pass on it.

It's best taken up by state legislature.

Cloutier & Shaughnessey: you could put it in the charter and say subject to state legislation.

Cloutier: everyone who works at the civic center agrees that renovation or replacement is necessary, and that would require commissioner & voter approval. Reorganizing for the next 30 years is on the agenda.

Shaughnessey: We don't have day-to-day oversight, but we are handed the bill. Second, if the county had a recreation district, it could be expanded- "Cumberland County Lakefront". I really like going in that direction.

Cloutier & Shaughnessey: People working at civic center are great.

Morgan: Our job is big enough, don't want to sink the ship by taking on something we can't change.

Cloutier & Shaughnessey: Anything charter would do would just be enabling, could be a positive element in District 3.

Villa: Thinks this is a hot button issue. \*\*\*\*\*

Gorden: What I like about civic center as it stands is the recreation district- they haven't taken advantage of the possibilities. It would be good to do more.

Shaughnessey: there is federal and state money that could be accessed to expand recreation district services to rural areas.

Villa: thinks charter commission should meet in Lakes region.

Elected Positions:

Cloutier: Sheriff Dion could be appointed. He's qualified, runs third largest correctional facility (and second largest mental health facility) in state- very talented.

District Attorney is different, is a prosecution district, is state employee.

Shaughnessey: Aroostook county had on ballot to have register of deeds and treasurer shot down, but was successful in Knox county. As we've moved forward and professionalized these positions, having them be appointed makes so much sense. Now that we have professional finance staff, treasurer becomes figurehead.

Cloutier: in past dead guy and felon had been elected.

Shaughnessey: it takes away from the professional veneer.

Morgan: do you think these changes are politically advisable?

Shaughnessey: I think these are hot button \*\*\*\*\* , maybe more so than civic center. Political parties like to use these offices as training ground- need to speak to those political parties before going public.

Cloutier: in the end you're going to have a one sentence justification for passing the charter. Assuming you don't jump in with both feet with making county government full-service, the one sentence is: "Rationalize, modernize, more fully enable county government", and everything you do in charter should point in that direction. You don't need to worry that there might be a few groups that are in support of status quo. If you have a central core purpose , then put things in there because they're the right thing to do, not because of what you think will work politically.

Gorden: yes. We should put mission statement on cover of charter.

Shaughnessey: 3.2 Not a fan of term limits.

Trice: could move term requirements into bylaws.

Shaughnessey: at state, term limits empower staff and lobbyists

Cloutier: doesn't like term limits either. At local level empowers staff.

Morgan: given these changes can you wholeheartedly support?

Cloutier: yes. Would like to see add'l paragraph granting general police powers.

Shaughnessey: we have ten times the number of public work employees than the national standard. Snow plows have to stop at the town line and turn around.

Trice: (to Cloutier) would police powers include county ordinance on top of municipal ordinances?

Cloutier: no, you'd have one or the other. The county would take responsibility for certain services, and be able to "You'd recreate the county as a general purpose entity" Power to act for the general health & safety of population, further education, maybe something about tranquility.

Crichton: When our county attorney reviews the document, she can create best language.

Morgan: the draft has not yet been reviewed by legal.

Eder: Thanks to Lunt and Gorden for work on language to date.

Final report has to be to commissioners by Sept 13 2010. 30 days after that date the Charter commission is abolished. Preliminary report needs to be available to voters in early June.