



County Of **CUMBERLAND** C H R O N I C L E



County Assessing Project

Cumberland County has been working with GPCOG and municipalities since 2006 on the possibility of property tax assessing as a regional service. The initial idea was an outgrowth of Cumberland County's 2001 and 2006 strategic plans and interviews with town managers, who saw assessing as a good service to be offered regionally. The benefits of having a regional assessing service include: providing high quality service at a time when many assessors are planning on retiring, having consistent practices and updated values, having information available online, and financial savings.

Staffed by Grants and Special Projects Coordinator Elizabeth Trice and Chaired by Standish town manager, Gordie Billington, the project received a grant from the state's Fund for Regional Efficiency in 2006 to hire a consultant. The consultant researched how much towns currently spend on assessing, what services are needed, and whether a regional service would save money. The consultant's work was overseen by an advisory committee of town managers, elected officials and assessors. This group is now working on a plan, chaired by Bridgton town Manager, Mitch Berkowitz, that towns can review to see how a regional service would work and decide if they would want to be one of the founding members. Some of the model services that the group has looked at include the CDBG program, EcoMaine, the Regional Forensic Lab, and the Cumberland County Regional Communications Center. The group hopes to have some information to report back by April 2009.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Trice at trice@cumberlandcounty.org.

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Cumberland County Community Development Program

Launched in 2007, culminating years of effort, the Cumberland County Community Development program is a regional initiative of the County and 24 partner communities. The program distributes \$1.5 million annually in grant funds from the Dept. of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) for local and regional programs. This is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program - focused on improving communities, neighborhoods and the lives of our low/moderate-income residents.

Cumberland County is the only county in New England with a direct allocation of CDBG funds from HUD. In our program, two communities receive a special allocation of funds, South Portland and Bridgton, with all other communities competing in an annual grant competition.

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CHRONICLE

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Program Highlights

- Two children's playgrounds have been completed - Harrison & Long Island
- A permanent home for the Gorham Ecumenical Food Pantry will be opening this month
- Restoration of the roof, chimney & steps of the historic Steep Falls Public Library in Standish is underway
- Conversion of the Naples Grange Hall to the Singer Community Center as a home for senior and youth activities will begin this winter
- Phase I of the revitalization of Gray Village is in progress
- Many projects are completed and ongoing in South Portland including: new sidewalks, reconfiguration of Waterman Drive, park improvements, and social service activities
- Major repairs and expansion of septic & leach fields serving downtown Bridgton are under contract and ready to begin
- Five unsafe, dilapidated mobile homes in Freeport have been replaced
- Eight household septic systems in Harpswell have been replaced.
- 16 housing rehabilitation projects have been completed in towns throughout the County including - New Gloucester, Harrison, Windham, Scarborough, North Yarmouth, Bridgton & Naples
- A highly successful County-wide program has prevented over 150 individuals and families from becoming homeless or assisted them in becoming housed when they were homeless.

The Future - 2009 and Beyond

We're in the midst of our 2009 application competition, the 3rd funding round since the program began. We anticipate 20 community-based and 4 region-wide requests for funds in a keen competition for limited resources. Awards will be announced in May.

We'll be working over the next months to bring the City of Westbrook into the program as our 25th member community. The inclusion of Westbrook will bring additional funds from HUD and a new set of projects and opportunities.

And, beginning July 2009 we will receive approximately \$500,000 annually in HUD HOME program funds with the formation of the City of Portland/Cumberland County HOME Consortium. This is a true regional partnership with all the communities of Cumberland County (excepting Frye Island) collaborating to address affordable housing.

Questions? Want more information? Contact Aaron Shapiro at 207-699-1905 or E-Mail him at shapiro@cumberlandcounty.org.



Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency Update

Over the past year, the Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency (CCEMA) has worked closely with Municipalities and organizations to strengthen their relationship and enhance emergency management capability. This relationship was tested and proven sound during two periods of significant inclement weather. The first occurred during July and August 2008 and involved a series of violent summer storms and flooding within the County. The second occurred during December 2008 and involved severe icing. The resulting damage and expenditures combined from these two periods of inclement weather is still being refined but currently sits at approximately \$1.75M and CCEMA is facilitating the coordination of Federal Assistance.

Several Department of Homeland Security competitive grant opportunities have come available over the past year and, again, CCEMA has worked closely with Municipalities and organizations to develop and submit applications. This collaboration has proven highly successful and has secured nearly \$1.4M in equipment and services which directly impact public safety and enhance emergency management capability within Cumberland County.

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C H R O N I C L E

From the Chair - Malory O. Shaughnessy

It is a new year and a new position for me as Chair of the Board of Commissioners. I am looking forward to this new challenge as it is a time of change, in Maine and for our country as a whole. We have hope for change coming in Washington DC, and hope that our new president will remember the needs within the local communities he worked in for so long.

It is time for the Federal Government to Restore the Partnership with local towns, cities and counties, and fulfill the promises it has made. Cumberland County will be working with the National Association of Counties in Washington to assure this partnership is restored. We will also be working with our legislative delegation to assure that Maine participates in the new stimulus package to address our infrastructure deficiencies.

After two years, I feel I am finally beginning to understand County Government as never before. I see its promise as a regional leader to bring people together. And I see its promise to provide some regional services efficiently and effectively. We must continue to explore these possibilities.

The newly elected Cumberland County Charter Commission will be looking at our structure, services and management, and making recommendations to help us move into the future. I will bring you updates through this column in the year to come and look forward to hearing from you with your thoughts and ideas. Please contact me anytime.

County Legislative Breakfast Issues Summary

On December 17th, the Cumberland County Partners hosted a County Legislative Breakfast at the Holiday Inn West in Portland. Over 70 legislators, municipal officials and other interested parties participated in identifying issues facing the towns and people of Cumberland County. The issues identified included tax reform, economic development, K-12 education, public safety and regional transportation. In addition, two of the top issues centered around developing countywide vision, identity, and means of collaboration. One focus was to create more effective influence in Augusta. The other was investigate how to work together better as a region through collaborative efforts.

The Cumberland County Partners are comprised of public and private interests including local and county government, non-profits serving the region, and the representatives of business. This is the third public meeting the group has hosted in the last year.





Cumberland District Public Health Council

There has been no better time to bring the many organizations and individuals addressing the public's health together to create regional approaches. The Cumberland District Public Health Council was created by a series of events starting in 2005 with the Local Public Health System Performance Assessment convened by the City of Portland's Public Health Division. This assessment measured how well the local public health system performed according to a set of national standards, and was followed by the County's strategic planning efforts in 2006. The Public Health & Human Services subcommittee identified regional public health as one of its top priorities. At the same time, the statewide Public Health Work Group developed recommendations to the Maine Legislature to begin to address the lack of local public health infrastructure. The Public Health Work Group's recommendations included dividing the state into eight public health districts, based on county and multi-county lines. The Cumberland District includes all of Cumberland County.

The Cumberland District Public Health Council was officially convened in December 2006, following the Public Health Work Group's decision to require district-wide coordinating councils. The council was initially known as the Cumberland County Coordinating Council for Public Health (C4PH), but was later renamed the Cumberland District Public Health Council. The founding members of the council include the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners, Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency, the City of Portland, Mercy Health Systems of Maine, Maine Medical Center & Maine Health, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and Healthy Cumberland County. The Council also consists of a wide variety of members from across the county. Members

represent towns, local health officers, K-12 schools, health care providers, home health providers, higher education, health institutions, mental health services, substance abuse services, community organizations, and a range of other non-profit organizations.

The purpose of the district council is to provide a place where towns, private businesses, and non-profit organizations can collectively prioritize public health issues in the region, plan appropriate responses, and organize partnerships that can address public health issues, assure access to preventive health and link with primary care, and plan for public health emergencies more efficiently than a single community could alone. In addition, the Cumberland District Public Health Council's mission is to promote the health of all the communities in the district by providing information, coordination, collaboration, and advocacy.

To date, the Council has made several presentations to the Greater Portland Council of Governments, held individual meetings with most towns in the district, created town- and multi-town level health status reports, reviewed local and state laws dealing with public health, provided health information brochures on a variety of topics to each town, and worked with a small number of towns to determine feasibility of contracting for certain public health services.

For more information, please visit the Council's web site at www.cdphc.portlandmaine.gov or call Julie Sullivan at 756-8054.

Here's to a healthy 2009!

C H R O N I C L E



From the Manager - Peter Crichton

As the great poet Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "The critical thing is not where you are today, but in what direction you are heading." In these challenging economic times when governments are facing increasing financial pressures and expectations to find more cost efficient, effective ways to deliver public services, this is indeed an era of challenges and opportunities.

In the case of Cumberland County Government, for the past several years we have been working collaboratively with various partners – our municipalities, the Greater Portland Council of Governments, the Muskie School, the business community, and nonprofit organizations like the Cooperative Extension Service, as well as others – on improving the future of our communities and region. Our two 5 Year Strategic Plans covering the periods of 2001-2005 and 2006-2010 have created the foundation for much of the visionary work we have undertaken the past eight years and represent our philosophy of collaboration, community building, and continuous improvement.

This edition of "The Cumberland County Chronicle" has been devoted to a few examples of the work being done to bring about positive changes in our communities and region with Cumberland County serving as a facilitator, convener, or service provider. The fact we are seeing a sea change with increasingly more communities deciding to join our regional communications center to save money and take advantage of our technology is a pretty good indicator we are moving in the right direction. The most

significant aspect of this change is the philosophy of collaboration being embraced by all those involved.

This same philosophy is evident in our community development program which is now entering its third year and to date is the only one in New England. With 24 municipalities participating and our Municipal Oversight Committee working closely with our community development director, in 2009 this program will bring in over \$1.5 million federal dollars in community development block grant and HOME funds for our municipalities and nonprofits. Our convening and facilitation roles in the regional assessing and public health initiatives are also examples of recent projects that have combined the elements of collaboration, community building, and continuous improvement.

The biggest lesson I have learned from these examples is that change can occur, and that it is not likely to happen when the elements of collaboration, community building, and continuous improvement are missing. We as a county government have taken these principles to heart and are putting them into practice. For more information on what we value as a county government, I would encourage you to take a few moments to view our website: www.cumberlandcounty.org and read the ten principles recommended by our Regional Relationship Committee which were adopted by the Commissioners as part of our 2006-2010 Strategic Plan.

If you have any thoughts contact me at crichton@cumberlandcounty.org or at 207-871-8380.

