

09/24/09 Cumberland County Delegation Meeting held at Spring Meadows in Gray:

The meeting began at 9:05 AM; by moderator Bill Whitten Commissioner Shaughnessy welcomed the 50 plus attendees. County Delegation chair Joan Cohen thanked everyone for attending and urged we continue meeting as a group in meetings like this and during the session.

Discussion then turned to the following:

Jail/mental health/substance abuse

Shaughnessy: Jail is emergency room, 90% mental health and substance abuse issues. "The new AMHI", people circulate in and out of jail with many health issues, very expensive. The bigger issue is mental health and health care. With the now consolidated jail and prison system, the state is now on the hook for increase in expenses. Drug courts are a good way to save money.

Haskell: the issues are being discussed at BOC level. As Maine has become Medicaid reliant, many services and policies have become driven by Federal policies. It's high on the agenda for BOC and corrections committee. Important to address criminogenic issues in mentally ill.

Protecting elderly from rising property taxes.

Someone has to make sure that property taxes don't surge up. Heyner: Property taxes are crucial. I predict excise tax referendum will pass, and that will impact roads and infrastructure. When roads need to get fixed, the property taxes will go up. It hits people on fixed income more than everyone else, and causes a lot of angst.

Education

Jackie Porter, Rep from Rep. Pingree: increasing quality of higher education is most important for economic development.

Shaughnessy: in the early 90's we had a discussion about how the research resources are at UMaine. Since economic resources are down here, we need to have educational resources down here.

New USM president is very interested in this, should be included in these discussions.

Alfond: there will be cuts this year to K-12 and Higher Ed. A disproportion of cuts to K-12 last year came from Cumberland County. It's important to think about education as a whole in the county.

SMCC rep: SMCC and USM take hard cuts – 9% cut from state funding, 11% increase in enrollment.

Finnegan: We need to be very strategic around our priorities. For education, everyone is going to get hit. Education is number one for what we need to get done this year.

Shaughnessy: SMCC has gotten all their courses online to be ready for a potential flu outbreak, and once courses are online, it's much easier to reach more people.

K-12 education is also important and will get cut again this year.

Positive Public Relations about government /taxes

Finnegan: The one thing we have in common is we're all involved in government. We do ourselves a dis-service when we let the conversation be about taxes instead of focusing

on our core functions. As a group we need to agree to be proud and positive about those services we provide. We need to do citizen education.

Region/County Government services

Feeney: County can provide more services to municipalities such as assessing. It's important to speak to municipal representatives about combining services, which could save a lot of money.

Whitten: Cumberland County has new microwave ready to go, which can allow for shared data systems among municipalities.

Haskell: As state legislators, we have very little impact on property taxes. One opportunity was the jail-prison consolidation. When we put the project in place there were three new jail projects slated to be built. By making this consolidation we have already saved about \$2M in what would have been property taxes. We need to get that in the press.

Whitten: It can be hard to get the media to report good news.

Transportation:

Alfond: Worried that there's not much emphasis about passenger rail in Cumberland County. Wants to hear from DOT on where the opportunities are for Cumberland County.

DOT Commissioner David Cole: Right now DOT has a \$35 M track 1 application to extend rail up to Brunswick. Application is for part of \$8B that is included in stimulus. Right now we're hopeful – we have one of the true ready-to-go projects in the country. We have a Fonsi of no significant impact. We're ready to order materials as soon as they give us the go ahead. We've also put in a 3-state application to make improvements between Portland and Boston to get people there in 2 hours. Also are taking advantage of TIGER grants – put in two applications – one is to renovate Mountain Division for \$25-30M to make it operable for freight, excursion, and hopefully someday commuter, also put in another request for money for a mega-berth and marine terminal in Portland. When you're talking to advocate groups there's never enough.

Veterans Bridge: \$50M price tag. Will be doing design-build. Instead of hiring a designer, put it out to build, and then put it out to bid, design build asks teams to put together solutions. We're looking at pedestrian, bicycle, as well as vehicular traffic so this bridge can function for another 100 years. It's been an evolution for our staff to learn that it's not about building infrastructure; it's about serving the public. Bridge design will be driven by function. The state has put a lot of money into Cumberland County in the last 5 years. 295 bridges are going to be worked on.

Whitten; can set up link on website to DOT for advocacy that needs to happen, e.g. Tiger grant advocacy.

Economic Development:

Allen: Creating regional technology “river” is important. COG is working on regional economic development, also is working aggressively to create regional planning process. It's important to think about building stronger alliances with York County.

Host Economic Development summit?

Other big issues:

Radio Communications among law enforcement

Strengthen Caucus and integration with reps from rural areas.

How can we integrate with rural caucus? Get Cumberland and Aroostook caucuses together. Any integrate better with our own rural legislators.

Whitten: north-south division is stronger than republican-democrat.

Menario: **Civic Center** was intended to bring national talent to our region. 38 years ago a bill was passed to create Cumberland County Recreation District with trustees nominated by the County Commissioners. A referendum was held, \$3.5 M was put up to build.

Otisfield was upset and left the county. It turned out it would cost \$8M, and the business community got together and put up \$4.5. It generates \$12-15 M of economic activity. Now the building is old. Newer buildings like Manchester can seat 12,000 people and attract the larger acts. The task force has been struggling to set the next steps. We can't afford to let it age to a point that it no longer functions.

We need more restrooms, concessions, seats. We are now doing an economic analysis of several plans and decide which gives the best return on investment. Eventually public money will be needed. When people come to this region, they want to know what they can do here. Some people think Maine is just for hunting, fishing, because that's how the State has done marketing for many years – outside the state they don't realize how many urban attractions we have.

Shaughnessey: next year is Cumberland County's 250th anniversary.

Rep Cohen: important to discuss region and county with colleagues.

Rep Sykes: ideally, there would be a more formal priority development process, but tabor etc will force prioritization. We don't yet have a good process.

We can't do everything. Think about a theme, maybe "Do less, but better".

Right now state pays teacher retirement portion but might move to GPA.

State might push more road maintenance to locals.

State already has \$39M shortfall in first two months.

State is talking about reducing length of school year to save money.

We should be careful of grant money. Lots of new programs get started, but most aren't evaluated and eliminated if they aren't effective.

Rep Peoples: a group is meeting with MMA, town engineers, etc regarding road maintenance— unless we get buy-in we're not going to force municipalities to take on responsibilities unless they're ready to do it. I would like to focus on how to maintain infrastructure. The roads are going to keep getting worse, and a 5 cent gas tax won't seem bad once the roads get really bad.

Notes on previous priorities from Anne Haskell: Legislature passed bad check program.

De-criminalize minor offense: marijuana law was changed; some parts of operating after suspension were decriminalized. More offenses could be decriminalized.

CONCLUSIONS:

It was agreed to put together an economic development sub committee, to have Cumberland County Government as a “clearing house” for all activity related to the delegation, providing information and resources for all, and to set up the “ad-hoc” Committee to determine major issues from those presented to be the focus for 2010 and then for the 125th legislature. Volunteers were asked to sign up, and you still can. The specific issues and questions discussed will be forwarded shortly, after our new intern prepares them in a useful format.

Meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM, thank you all for attending.

Any comments, questions, please contact Bill Whitten at:

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