

The Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration  
October 30, 2009  
Minutes

Ms. Lopez called the meeting to order and gave a brief overview on The Ohio Commission on Local Government.

In attendance:

Anita Lopez, Co-Chair  
Daniel Troy, Co-Chair  
Tim Downing  
Jennifer Economus

Dan Foley  
Larry Wolpert  
Michael Cochran  
Tom Weidman

Mr. Troy moved for the approval of the September 25, 2009 minutes; Mr. Cochran seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Downing provided the financial report. To date, the Commission has received itemized invoices for \$26,937.13 from the John Glenn Public Policy Institute. Mr. Downing moved for approval of the payment of the invoices; Ms. Economus seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Deborah Feldman, Montgomery County Administrator, welcomed the Local Government Commission. She discussed the competitive local tax structures and governance issues that detract from any success that could come from collaborative efforts. Ms. Feldman discussed the recent Brookings Institute study on local government that details the benefits of tax revenue sharing. Economic development must be accomplished regionally, and the tax structure must reflect that.

Mr. Troy talked about a recent situation in Lake County that involved an over-response under mutual aid agreements to a fairly insignificant fire and the inefficient consumption of tax dollars that occurs in those types of situations. Ms. Feldman said that we have to look at how we can make this work better, both from a tax standpoint and a service standpoint.

Mr. Wolpert asked about how you could regionalize the tax structure and support all of the current local governments. Ms. Feldman explained that you would need to redistribute the collections to adequately fund local services.

Mr. Foley asked Ms. Feldman to describe the current grant program process in the Miami Valley region. This is a tool for the three county areas to look for ways to collaborate, and it includes proposals for forgivable loans to companies or earmarking portions of revenues for workforce development.

Mr. Cochran asked if people should have the choice to live or work in a community without a tax. Ms. Feldman said that unless we start to work together, we will not be able to provide the services that economic development demands. However, we must also realize that different types of communities do make Ohio unique and in some ways desirable. Mr. Cochran also added that the truth is that every major city is losing population, and isn't it safe to assume that there are multiple reasons why businesses are choosing other areas. Ms. Feldman said taxes

are not the only reason for population movement, but it seems that locations with strong regional strategies are working.

Daniel Geroni gave a report on behalf of The John Glenn Institute, which included an annotated Bibliography of studies from New Jersey, New York, and Indiana, and attached charts demonstrating any progress and implementation in these example states on their collaboration efforts.

Mr. Downing stated that he was concerned that the New Jersey report resulted in little or no action and its recommendations have gone unaddressed. He fears this will happen in Ohio. He asked if Mr. Geroni had any thoughts on avoiding that plight in Ohio. Mr. Geroni replied that he will provide recommendations at the next meeting.

Mr. Troy noted that Ohio history will show that, unfortunately, many commission reports didn't result in active implementation, but believes that should not dissuade us from continuing our work, stating our findings, and making recommendations that we believe should be considered.

Ms. Lopez announced that there will be no Commission meeting in November. Mr. Downing announced that the next meeting will be at the Cleveland Public Library 325 Superior Ave. on December 4 at 10:30 a.m.

The Subcommittee on Taxation will be meeting on December 2 at the MORPC office in downtown Columbus. The other two subcommittees are still working on their meeting schedules.

Mr. Parker, President and CEO of Dayton Regional Chamber of Commerce testified. He stated that many share some of the Commission's concern about whether the legislature will actually do anything with this report. The Chamber has concerns about communities being pitted against each other. We dealt with the 911 dispatch issue here. We have also dealt with joint road construction projects. Tax structure is certainly part of the problem, particularly income tax structure.

Mr. Bob Steinbach, Director of Regional Initiatives for the Miami Valley Area, indicated that multicounty regional governments have great advantages. We have 16 regional planning organizations that cover 81% of the state's population. Smaller jurisdictions have a great deal of difficulty dealing with single impact situations like the closing of a large business. Metropolitan transportation has proven to be a very effective use of multicounty authorities. He stated that other areas of effectiveness include environmental protection and economic development. Agreeing on a regional planning commission is an important aspect of making this successful, and he urges the commission to recommend in its report that more emphasis should be placed on the regional process.

Mr. Downing asked if there are areas that aren't covered by regional planning agencies. Mr. Steinbach said that it is primarily between Cleveland and Columbus. Mr. Steinbach suggested that since regional authorities already exist, it is probably not as controversial to consider expanding their scope.

Mr. Troy asked how you get regional planning authorities to not “over plan”; and to actually proceed in accomplishing more implementation, Mr. Steinbach explained that regional planning commissions are creatures of their boards, so they must follow those directives. The boards do have the expertise to consider a wide range of subjects.

Mr. Cochran said that if it is just planning, that isn't a problem. It is that the people should have some say in things, and not just the board. Mr. Steinbach said that you could have an elected regional board.

Mr. Foley said that the Commission members are frustrated because we come to this report with two minds. We are looking for areas of collaboration, but we also know that this report also has to be acceptable in our communities. Do you have any ideas as to whether we need to include in our report some instructions on how to implement what we eventually suggest needs to be done? Mr. Parker replied that you will likely get some groups that are interested and ready to act on some of things that you include in your report. They may not embrace all of your recommendations, but they will work on those that they do.

Jane Dockery from WSU on behalf of Shared Services Delivery Project in Green County is committed to a grassroots effort to save 5% on the 40% of school spending that is non-instructional expense. She says that Gov. Strikland has much interest in this project. No public dollars are being spent and that foundations and partners are funding the project. They have an advisory committee that is identifying places where this is working, developing a database of information, and finally setting some goals.

Ms. Economus comments that when this project came about, it only made sense to collaborate their efforts in conjunction with the commission.

Ms. Dockery also pointed out examples of shared services with townships, cities and schools districts. She stated that they were not only looking school district to school district to save money, but also to other jurisdictions.

The Commission recessed for a 15 minute lunch break.

Oakwood Mayor Judy Cook spoke as a representative of the 13 communities that comprise the First Suburbs Consortium of Dayton. Binding arbitration dominates our budgets. We have respect for our safety forces, but we have no budget controls because of binding arbitration, and it hampers their ability to address other needed initiatives. This must be addressed in the Commission's report. No gubernatorial administration in Ohio has been willing to deal with this issue. In addition, although the population of Montgomery County has shrunk by 1%, the infrastructure and land use has, through urban sprawl, expanded by 45%. The current tax structure cannot support this expansion.

Greg Horn, City Manager of Centerville, believes that a major structural impediment to local government collaboration exists in Ohio because townships and villages have been thrust into an unintended situation. Townships are managed by “trustees” that are historically supposed to hold land in trust until it is absorbed by a city. Urban townships must take responsibility for all of their services; they should not be underwritten or subsidized by tax dollars from contained or neighboring municipalities, or to a great

degree by the county. He hoped that the report of the Commission will include recommendations that should happen, and not limit it to just those that are politically popular.

Mr. Downing asked Mr. Horn if the local State Representative or Senator supports these changes. Mr. Horn replied that he hoped they would take the position that the recommendations should be considered rationally on their merits and that political consideration would be of reduced consequence.

Mr. Foley acknowledged that State Representative Seth Morgan, County Recorder Lois Black, and State Representative Bob Hackett are at the meeting.

Mr. Downing moved to adjourn. Mr. Troy seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.