

M.O.R.E. Commission
Regional Entities Sub-Committee
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, June 16, 2015

Those Present:

Rep. Peggy Sayers, Rep. Jonathan Steinberg, Brian Anderson, Rep. Mike Demicco, John Filchak, Betsy Gara, Scott Gaul, Rep. Bob Godfrey, Sam Gold, Deb Hinchey, Rep. Susan Johnson, Bob Labanara, Pat Llodra, Sheila McKay, Jeff Otto, Leo Paul, Francis Pickering, Christine Ruman, Don Stein, Jeff Tomchick, Jim Vigue

Those Absent:

Sen. Paul Formica, Carl Amento, Susan Bransfield, Jeff Bridges, Sen. Steven Cassano, Rep. Theresa Conroy, John Elsesser, Peter Foote, Carp Fortuna, William Fritz, Rep. John Hampton, Rich Ives, Matthew Knickerbocker, Rep. Gail Lavielle, Cynthia Mangini, Steve McKeever, Kevin Murphy, Robert Namnoum, Lisa Pellegrini, Bonnie Reemsyde, Lena Rodriguez, Rep. Jason Rojas, Rep. Chris Rosario, Pat Sampson, Melissa Schlag, Daniel Steward, Joyce Stille, Steve Vavrek, Stephen Woods, Lyle Wray, Rep. Tami Zawistowski, Jeremy Zeedyk

The meeting was called to order by Rep. Peggy Sayers at 10:38am, she made a motion for approval of the last meeting's minutes.

Rep. Jonathan Steinberg thanked the sub-committee for their hard work throughout the 2015 legislative session and asked for their continued efforts through the summer.

Rep. Sayers introduced John Filchak and asked for a report from the education policy working group.

John Filchak briefly recapped the education policy working group's prior meetings and future agenda.

Rep. Sayers referenced attempted legislation for PSAP consolidation and asked the group to consider future topics for the sub-committee to cover.

Pat Llodra expressed her frustration and desire to see legislation come from the group. She also reminded members about legislation enacted in Maine and Vermont that she would like to see covered in future meetings.

John Filchak noted that the education policy working group is looking into hosting guest speakers from Vermont and Maine to discuss how they have consolidated in regards to their education systems.

Rep. Sayers explained the difficult process of passing legislation through both Chambers.

Pat Llodra asked how the group can make their voice more powerful.

Rep. Sayers responded that over the four years since the MORE Commissions inception there has been legislation passed.

Rep. Susan Johnson discussed emergency services and the drastic difference between each and every town in the state noting that one of the main challenges for the MORE Commission is to try and coordinate between each municipality. She also referenced past legislation put forth from the group that was very helpful to the towns.

Rep. Sayers pointed out that sometimes legislation can get lost due to fiscal impacts.

Rep. Steinberg congratulated the group for past successes and mentioned that one of the Commission's obligations is to get the municipalities on board.

Don Stein reminded the group that the regional policing working group is still planning to meet over the summer as well. He also inquired about the \$20 million written into the budget for the MORE Commission and asked how this money will be used.

Rep. Sayers responded that because the budget implementers are still being negotiated that she cannot speak as to how this money can be used.

Rep. Steinberg mentioned that these funds are an expectation of savings not money that is set aside.

Don Stein responded that there is \$20 million of money in the budget that is unaccounted for.

Rep. Steinberg said that it is not unreasonable for municipalities to be weary of this problem and that it is highly unlikely for the legislature to do something that will leave certain municipalities with "holes in their budget" this late in the year.

John Filchak commented that there has been a progression of action taken by the group over the years not the least of which was the reorganization of the COGs.

Rep. Sayers moved the group back to discussing future meeting topics.

Leo Paul inquired about the reduction in funding to the COGs

Sam Gold mentioned that River COG is losing 191,000 in population, Capitol Region is gaining about 200,000 and Southcentral is gaining around 68,000.

Leo Paul expressed the importance of funding for the COGs.

Leo Paul recapped the old list of topics of discussion that was drafted by the sub-committee earlier in the year.

Rep. Sayers thanked Leo Paul and asked members if there are any other topics that they would like to discuss going forward and how often they would like to meet during the summer.

Sam Gold asked about the possibility for tele-conference meetings during the summer months.

Don Stein agreed that this would be worthwhile and suggested that the working groups continue to meet until they have suggestions and then call the larger sub-committee back for a meeting.

Christine Ruman reminded the group of Commissioner Mullen's prior presentation and the possibility of consolidating public health districts.

Scott Gaul asked if there is a way to prioritize topics based off of potential cost savings and gains for the municipalities.

Rep. Sayers noted that one of the problems with this method has to do with the differences between each town and that there is a potential for each to have different priorities when it comes to cost saving.

Rep. Johnson followed up that some initiatives are easier to do than others based off of the geography of the state. She also suggested looking into regionalizing school districts in places where it would make the most sense.

John Filchak suggested looking into regional revenue sharing. He referenced the Minnesota law and that the MORE Commission might be a good place to start in terms of getting a head start with this topic. He expressed optimism that funding for the COGs will be restored in the implementer bill.

Leo Paul referenced the regional school districts in his town and how at times there is a waste of resources. He also asked for a study regarding population reduction in school systems.

Sam Gold suggested investigating the topic of regional transit districts.

Rep. Johnson mentioned that the regional school district in eastern Connecticut would benefit from expansion. She also referenced legislation that she proposed this session in regards to regional transit districts.

Scott Gaul agreed that regional transit districts would benefit the majority of people in the state in terms of cost benefits.

Rep. Steinberg mentioned the opportunities that regional transit will create. He also brought up a potential complication regarding a conflict between the COGs and MPOs.

Betsy Gara stated that regional policing creates questions in statute. She also clarified the process involved with legislation that comes forth from the MORE Commission and asked for better transparency.

Rep. Sayers stated that the PSAP consolidation bill from the 2015 session is something that can be fine-tuned and brought forward again next year. She also asked if members had any suggestions for future guest speakers.

Leo Paul commented that the regional policing working group plans on meeting with the Torrington PD and suggested using the COGs as a resource for determining priorities.

Don Stein suggested prioritizing a list of three topics that would be most beneficial. He also agreed that the COGs should be used as a benchmark for regionalization.

Rep. Sayers mentioned two towns in her district that attempted and failed to consolidate animal control.

Sam Gold also stated interest in using the COGs as a point of reference going forward.

John Filchak announced that July 2nd is the next meeting for the education policy working group and that the Education Commissioner will be the guest speaker.

Leo Paul referenced a feasibility study conducted in his county and the need for a grant to build a regional facility in Torrington.

Rep. Sayers asked members to consider which topics are most important and asked how often they would like to meet during the summer.

Sam Gold reiterated the need for an assessment of feasibility for some of these topics.

Rep. Sayers asked the group if transit districts were a priority.

John Filchak expressed his interest in transit districts.

Rep. Sayers briefed members on the plan for the summer.

Rep. Johnson addressed regional public health districts as a priority.

Rep. Sayers suggested Tuesday, July 14 as a tentative meeting date and recommended asking the Commissioner of Transportation to speak on the topic of transit districts.

John Filchak mentioned numerous advocacy groups that could cover the topic of transit districts as well.

Sam Gold stated that Commissioner Redeker previously did work with regional transit during his time spent in New Jersey.

Rep. Sayers adjourned the meeting at 11:35am.

