

Report #1 of the Public Safety Committee

Presentation to:
Municipal Governing Bodies
March 18, 2010

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PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

March 18, 2010

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ATTACHMENT:

- A. NewTownCity Map
- B. Recommendation: Motion to Continue Committee

Executive Summary

In June 2009, the Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin and Montpelier and East Montpelier boards were requested by the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce to appoint representatives to serve on the Regional Public Services Committee in order to consider regionalization of these safety components: police, dispatch, fire and ambulance. Committee members met from September 2009 through March 2010.

In so-doing they:

- A. Created area map and coined the term “NewTownCity” for the service area;
- B. Adopted a Vision Statement: “Create a public safety authority that provides NewTownCity with an affordable, integrated, efficient system of public safety services (fire, police, ambulance, dispatch) that protects public welfare and provides rapid responses with highly qualified personnel when emergency situations arise;”
- C. Concluded that Governance should consist of a public safety authority with its membership deriving from the four partners by election and/or appointment, the formation of which will require municipal and legislative approvals;
- D. Determined that Financing for the operation of the Authority will likely consist of a combination of local assessments, fees for services, grants, and other appropriate financing, and,
- E. Adopted a process for Moving Forward that projects the earliest possible implementation of the Authority to be July 2012 with actual provision of service(s) likely to be no sooner than July 2013.

Introduction

As follow up to a meeting of the municipal governing bodies of Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin, East Montpelier and Montpelier on June 20, 2009, the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce invited the municipalities to appoint representatives to a joint committee on public safety. Over the course of the next few months, the municipalities (except East Montpelier) appointed representatives, and the committee's initial meeting was held Sept. 24, 2009.

The Committee has not only pursued the Vision Statement and Process, but also the issues of governing and financing of what has since been referred to as the "Public Safety Authority."

The geography of participating towns served by the authority has come to be known as "NewTownCity." Persons serving on the Public Safety Authority's board of directors are referenced as "governors" in this document.

While this language may be awkward at first, we have found that "board," "council" and other common verbiage is equally awkward, and it is more prone to confusion.

This document is a product of many compromises. Only through extensive compromise can eight individual appointees, holding perspectives from four unique municipalities, reach agreement on issues of this magnitude. The focus on common good rather than individual preferences was key – and it will become ever more imperative when this initiative moves forward.

Every statement, every suggestion, every finding in this document is tentative. Each aspect of creating and successfully operating the Public Safety Authority influences every other aspect. Until a comprehensive package of recommendations can be generated, everything is "tentative" and will be revisited. "Shall" and "will" reflect greater certainty than "might," but all remain "tentative."

Some of the governance or management issues presented may not coincide with state statutes. The Committee recognizes such possibilities and has chosen to ignore them for the time being. The goal here is to first determine what is desired and to seek permission, if necessary, later.

Like most citizens and municipal bodies, the Committee believes that there is a better, more efficient system of public safety service delivery than exists today. At the same time, it recognizes that today's system evolved over time due to the political boundaries that are in place.

Therefore, the successful operation of a new delivery system is best supported by a new governmental unit that spans current boundaries and provides service to the expanded geography with as little regard for municipal borders and local politics

as possible. As a largely autonomous public body, it would make policy, own or lease space and equipment, and hire professional staff to administer and execute its policies.

The Committee found it imperative to test the structure and composition of this body as well as to explore financing its operations if there was to be any serious potential for long-term success.

Eight meetings were held Sept. 24, Oct. 8, Oct. 22, Nov. 12, and Dec. 3, 2009 as well as Feb. 4, Feb. 25, and March 4, 2010. Attendance was outstanding. All four participating municipalities had at least one appointee or alternate at each of the meetings. In most cases, each municipality had two representatives present. No one was bashful, and there were as many different views as there were people.

Each meeting was webcast live and video recorded. Video archives of meetings may be viewed at ustream.tv/cvchamber.

Votes were rarely taken. The committee's goal was to ultimately reach consensus – a comprehensive position that all participants could support as a unit even though some might have personally preferred significantly different language in certain sections.

Vision Statement

The easiest task the committee encountered was adoption of the vision statement. The goal was clear:

Create a public safety authority that provides NewTownCity with an affordable, integrated, efficient system of public safety services (fire, police, ambulance, dispatch) that protects public welfare and provides rapid responses with highly qualified personnel when emergency situations arise.

Governance

“Create a Public Safety Authority” sounds simple enough, but what does it look like, how are governors chosen, how does it evolve if NewTownCity grows or shrinks. The committee discussed these issues at length.

Recommended elements of a governance structure (assuming four participating towns) were:

Each town appoints one governor and the collective residents of the municipalities elect three other governors at-large. These seven governors are the sole policy and

decision-making body for the Public Safety Authority, a governmental unit with its own charter or bylaws.

Municipalities could choose to have their governors elected rather than appointed and might be urged to consider doing so after the authority has achieved some level of public acceptance.

The Public Safety Authority will govern, as a single entity, all of the services under its jurisdiction and assess participating municipalities accordingly. Municipalities not fully participating in (and funding) all services cannot be considered participants in the Public Safety Authority and will not appoint governors nor participate in the election of governors.

However, the Authority would have the power to contract with non-participating towns to provide specific services when useful and prudent.

Financing

The Public Safety Authority shall be financed by municipal assessments.

The authority shall confirm the amount of taxpayer funding needed, determine the share to be assessed to each municipality according to its cost-sharing formula, and present that assessment to each municipality for payment.

In accordance with common practice, the Authority will seek to maximize appropriate grant opportunities, service fees, contracts and other revenues to minimize the amount of taxpayer funding required.

Conversely, it will seek to be cost efficient and cost effective in allocating resources so as to provide quality service at the lowest possible cost.

Annually, the Authority will draft a three-year operating budget as well as a five-year capital budget when determining the specific assessment for the coming year. With this information, municipalities can make preliminary estimates of future assessments.

Public Safety is designed to protect structures and possessions as well as to safeguard human life. The Committee recognizes that each public safety department has unique revenue opportunities and differing levels of readiness and performance expenses. Each community differs both in its composition and its daily and seasonal fluctuations. The formula should be kept as simple as possible, but also be based on the most appropriate data inputs.

Moving Forward

When authorized to continue, the Committee will begin to analyze the advantages, disadvantages, obstacles and costs associated with creating a Public Safety Authority.

The Committee has determined that there are state, community and consultant resources available that can, at very reasonable cost, design effective and efficient service systems for the NewTownCity community.

In general, its approach will be to identify the required personnel, equipment, deployment, and budget to provide quality public safety services and emergency response times for the NewTownCity geographic area and its development pattern.

It will seek input and comments on each proposed design from knowledgeable locals, including service providers, to verify or modify the designs.

It will then catalogue and compile the current personnel, equipment, deployment and budgets of the municipalities for comparison.

It will seek input on opportunities for and obstacles to moving from current configurations to the proposed service delivery designs, and it will document these opportunities and obstacles.

It will seek to compare the cost of current configurations with proposed designs over time.

Finally, the committee will seek to determine which reconfigurations would be most advantageous, which might be the easiest to implement, which have the greatest value, and therefore, which, if any, ought to be most vigorously pursued.

In addition, the committee may have comments on which, if any, services might be substantially improved through some alternative course of action.

The committee estimates that accomplishing the design and evaluation of all four public safety services will require no less than 12 additional months – even with the Committee meeting twice monthly.

Legal, statutory and political steps would likely take another 18 months.

Public Safety Service Evaluation Outline

(Done separately for each service unit / department: police, fire, ambulance, dispatch.)

After having identified and engaged a “consultant” to propose the proper personnel, equipment and deployment of resource for a given service, the Committee will seek input to 1) test the consultant’s proposal, 2) to understand the current condition of this service, 3) to understand the pros and cons, obstacles and opportunities, of changing from the current condition to the proposed, and 4) to determine the relative cost, value and ease of moving from the current to the proposed. A series of four meetings (approximately 45 minutes per meeting) on each service might flow as follows...

Meeting 1

Committee receives consultant’s proposed personnel and equipment needs to operate an efficient and effective police/fire/ambulance/dispatch service for NewTownCity. Proposal includes “deployment” items such as locations, on-duty levels, etc. Consultant walks through proposal for the committee.

Meeting 2

Committee invites local field personnel. Consultant walks through the proposal. Field personnel ask questions on proposed system, providing comments to the Committee and consultant. Committee and consultant consider any modification of the proposal.

Meeting 3

Municipal representative(s) present current personnel and equipment levels as well as current deployment. Field personnel identify transitional elements, indicating level of difficulty and the perceived pros and cons for each transitional element.

Meeting 4

Committee with assistance from appropriate resources (if any) estimates the cost differential between Proposed and Current, estimates service differential between Proposed and Current, and defines the “degree of difficulty” for making the transition from Current to Proposed.

Timeline for Implementation of Public Safety Authority

Twice annually the Committee will invite the governing bodies for a joint presentation/discussion of progress, issues and interests.

YEAR 2010

- March – Boards receive Public Safety Committee Report.
- March – Boards vote on continuing the study of Public Safety Authority.
- Apr-Dec – Committee works on salient issues:
 - Structure of the Authority,
 - By-laws,
 - Assessment of existing personnel, facilities and services.
- October – Convene meeting of four boards to share information.

YEAR 2011

- Jan-Feb – Public Meetings.
- March – Citizens vote formation of the Public Safety Authority.
- May – Request to the Legislature for approval of the formation of the Public Safety Authority.
- September – Citizens vote to approve inclusion of the Authority within their Charter.

YEAR 2012

- January – Charter changes submitted to the Legislature for revisions to include the Authority.
- July – Authority officially convenes.

Guide to Committee Terms

NewTownCity – The combined geographic area of Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin and Montpelier.

Public Safety Authority – The governing body of the combined public safety services serving NewTownCity.

Governors – Individuals appointed or elected to the NewTownCity Public Safety Authority whose votes determine the policies of the authority.

Wards – The local voting districts that follow the boundary lines of participating municipalities.