

County Reform Needed Now

There is no surprise in reading the latest news about our county government's dysfunction over the hiring of an administrator, the operation of the fire academy, the managing of court leases and the handling of debt. Even more concerning is that the County Government has become less visible and less engaged in regional challenges including development of a regional capital plan. Many Cape citizens actually believe that County government in Barnstable County was abolished like it was in most of Massachusetts.

The disappointing aspect is that we know the organizational weaknesses that directly contribute to these lapses. In March of 2012, the County's Special Commission on County Governance issued its report calling for the streamlining of regional government. The problems are not caused by bad people but rather by an obtuse, inefficient structure. Implementation of the Special Commission's recommendations has largely remained stalled in the Assembly of Delegates. One of the recommendations was to downsize and merge the Assembly of Delegates and County Commissioners into a single legislative body. The current charter requires these elected officials to downsize themselves. Thus downsizing requires both leadership and courage in eliminating the very job an official proudly holds.

The good news is that we know how to excel at regional solutions. The recent completion of the Clean Water Act Section 208 Areawide Water Quality Plan points out how regional government in the form of the Cape Cod Commission and the towns can work together to be innovative, optimize results, and likely save money while maintaining local control. We should transfer the lessons learned from the 208 process and reorganize the rest of regional government so that it is innovative, optimizes results and saves us money. The 208 process was transparent and visible and provided a sense that government can actually solve challenging problems. It is an ideal model with proven results.

For nearly a decade organizations like the Cape Cod Business Roundtable), League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area, Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce and the Association to Preserve Cape Cod) have been strong advocates of reforming county government into an efficient and effective regional government. We did so not to support bigger or more expansive government but to create a more functional government with efficient service delivery and greater regional visibility, recognizing that many municipal challenges are shared and can be resolved once instead of 15 times or in 15 different ways. The current form of county government with 18 elected officials overseeing a total budget of less than \$30 million, much of which is nondiscretionary spending, is cumbersome, bloated and simply a potential ATM for waste and abuse.

The Cape Cod Business Roundtable, League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area, Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce, and Association to Preserve Cape Cod urge the Assembly to do its job and institute the changes recommended by the Special Commission in the Charter that are needed to effectuate a streamlined County government. If, for whatever reason, this does not occur by the first quarter of 2016, we urge the Cape Cod legislative delegation to introduce a new County Charter consistent with the Special Commission's recommendations in the state legislature.