

August 17, 2009, LUARCC Meeting Notes

The meeting convened at 9:30 AM. Present were: John H. Fisher, III, Chair; Edwin Carman (for the Acting Commissioner); David Rousseau, State Treasurer; Marvin Reed; Robert F. Casey; Gary Passanante, and Steven M. Cozza.

Minutes of the July 23, 2009, meeting were approved. All voted in favor except Edwin Carman and David Rousseau, who abstained.

Report of the Process Subcommittee: The Subcommittee reviewed the Rutgers report and made modifications including narrowing the number of clusters to six. The Subcommittee hopes to have a report in time for the League of Municipalities Conference in November.

Presentation from the Walter Rand Institute. Gwendolyn Harris and Richard Harris of the Walter Rand Institute (WRI) of Rutgers – Camden presented a proposal to support certain activities of the LUARCC. : Richard Harris is the Director of the WRI. Gwendolyn Harris is the Principal Investigator. Under the proposal, WRI will add staffing and support to LUARCC's efforts to identify, study and assist municipalities that may benefit from consolidation or shared services. WRI will manage and work with consulting teams and act as a neutral third party facilitator.

A Commissioner commented that all things are political and he does not think WRI as a neutral third party will have the same influence as LUARCC Commissioners with local officials. WRI agreed that LUARCC's role is paramount; WRI is secondary and supportive. A Commission Member also stated that WRI is more than just a research arm; it can and should make recommendations to LUARCC. As part of its work WRI will review the work that Commissioner Casey has done and validate that work and/or make recommendations to improve it. This particular idea was repeated throughout the meeting. WRI & LUARCC must understand the volatility of the subject with the locals, but must keep information private to LUARCC until it is properly reviewed. One Commissioner indicated the need for "raw" data that WRI gathers as opposed to "processed" data. WRI should support, not supplant LUARCC.

The Executive Director indicated that, under the proposal, the municipal teams will be approved by LUARCC before they go into the field. WRI said they want and need LUARCC's input in selecting consultants. It was pointed out that at the last Commission meeting the Commission recognized the need to get information from the Department of Education as to where they are on school consolidation and how it fits with LUARCC's objectives. There may even be instances where we will have to decouple schools and municipalities. LUARCC's long-term goals need to be determined. At this point LUARCC is testing the water on the possibility of voluntary consolidation of municipalities. The municipalities may agree that Casey's model is correct, but some municipalities may not agree on a form of government for the consolidated municipality. LUARCC still needs to discuss where the Commission drops out or pulls back during the consolidation process and Local Government

Services and the Local Finance Board come in. One Commission member said It is important to understand that if there is no mutual savings in a municipal consolidation, then the consolidation is dead.

The question was asked regarding the WRI budget: are these figures “hard” or “soft?” The figures are soft. Commission still investigating the “why” and next must figure out the “how.” The only “why” we have is Casey’s report. WRI indicated that they were uncomfortable with the division between “why” and “how” – the two may be mixed and merged, thus inseparable. Also, WRI suggested, we need to look at “what:” What will solution look like? A Commissioner indicated that the data will be gathered, but it does not presuppose a recommendation. WRI will gather information, but LUARCC must decide what comes next. WRI will not be driving consolidation. LUARCC will be recommending approximately 35 clusters for potential consolidation reviews. The question was asked what is the time frame for doing the WRI studies?

Reports of the Regional Subcommittees

North Subcommittee. The North Subcommittee met on Friday, July 31, 2009 in Princeton municipal building. Present were Steve Cozza, Bob Casey, Marvin Reed and Dennis Smeltzer. Basically, the Subcommittee discussed the towns covered by the North Subcommittee to identify three preliminary possible clusters. A list is being developed for a first round of talks, which will include 10 pairings. A second list will identify towns more likely for the second round. Also being identified are towns to monitor due to current activity related to consolidation.

The Subcommittee also spoke about how to present and who to present to when they first meet or make first contact. They thought that the discussion would be better served for the full commission. Their thought was first point of contact would be the Mayors.

South Subcommittee. The South Subcommittee approach was different. They went to trying to identifying three immediately. This Subcommittee wants to reach out to potential municipalities to determine receptivity before placing them on a definite list. They also want to include shared services coordinators to get a sense of probability of a warm reception. The Subcommittee is getting mixed responses with the people we have reached out to. While no meetings with individual municipalities have taken place the Subcommittee anticipates some preliminary meetings in the near future

Both Subcommittees should have a standard protocol but recognize that it must be flexible to accommodate the local situation. A natural source to reach out to are the legislators. They give us the practical sense of what is coning on in the towns. This is something that should be done before we go out to the locals.

Executive Director's Report: met with WRI, who submitted a revised two year plan. Working on a roadmap for LUARCC. Hopes to have outline by September. Ethics training needs to be scheduled for LUARCC.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 24, 2009.

General Discussion

Closed Executive Session

Following the closed session, the Commission adjourned.