

Belknap County
“County Conversations”
Wrap Up Forum

August 12, 2009

Introduction

This document summarizes the August 12, 2009 County Conversations Wrap Up Forum hosted by the Belknap County Board of Commissioners. This summary is not intended to be a verbatim recreation of that meeting, but rather to capture its key points.

The Wrap Up Forum followed the Commissioners’ County Conversations series which occurred during June 2009. The series took Commissioners to municipalities throughout the County to meet with elected officials and interested citizens. Meetings focused on two primary points: 1) (re) introduction of the scope of services provided by the County; 2) opportunities for the County and municipalities to collaborate.

Forum Format and Agenda

The Wrap Up Forum brought together members of the County legislative delegation, municipal elected officials and staff and representatives of County agencies/organizations with the County Commissioners and County Manager.

The Forum’s agenda included:

- Review of main themes of the County Conversations meetings.
- Review of the goals established by the Commissioners as part of their strategic planning efforts.
- Facilitated discussion around the question of “What should the County be five years from now.”
- Facilitated discussion regarding ideas on how to keep the dialog established in the County Conversations series moving forward.

What Should the County be Five Years from Now?

Discussion on this question turned on three major themes: improvement in service; ways to enhance County/municipality/agency communication; questions the County/municipalities/agencies should consider. Responses included:

- Economically strong
- Coordinated services
- Efficient
- Provide services that municipalities cannot
- Increased communication (Cont’d.)

What Should the County be Five Years from Now? (Cont'd.)

- Better organized
- Get done what is needed to be done
- Consideration of what residents need from the County (beyond what the County must provide)
- Adoption of common goals
- Identification of what needs to be done and determination of how does the County fits in the delivery of those needs
- Public safety provider
- Long Term Care vision and execution
- Environment
- Provide a safety net for citizens
- Involvement in delivery of public works oriented services.
- Economic development
- Keep outside services (Focus on education/anticipation of what services agencies provide and how they are delivered.)
- Assist in the consolidation of funded agencies
- Drive tourism initiatives
- Involvement in public education
- Catalyst for communication between municipalities
- Explore public/private partnerships
- Health insurance for municipality
- Participation in setting common vision (with municipalities and sister counties)
- Improve County image and connection with citizens

Keeping the Dialog Moving Forward

- Council of City/Towns
- Must start at the local level
- County must enhance its role as facilitator
- Create “action groups” to tackle issues/opportunities

Summary

The facilitator was struck by two themes throughout the evening:

- 1) a call for immediate action;
- 2) the sense that a more global vision of County/Municipal relations is necessary before moving forward.

It seems both possible and appropriate to move on both fronts simultaneously. In order to keep the momentum achieved by the *Conversations Series* and the *Wrap-Up Forum* moving forward, the dialog must continue. There was strong sentiment for the creation of the “Council of City/Towns” noted above. It would be prudent to have that Council identify a “doable” goal for the County and its municipalities to jointly take on and achieve.