

Governor's Task Force on Shared Municipal Services  
November 29, 2012, 1:00 p.m.  
East Providence City Hall

Present: Chairperson John Simmons, Executive Director Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC); Mayor Donald R. Grebien of Pawtucket; Peter Grazcykowski, City Manager City of East Providence; John McJennett, Receiver City of Central Falls; and Susanne Greschner, Director of the Office of Municipal Finance

Also in Attendance: Leslie Taito, Director of Regulatory and Quality Management Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation

Mr. Simmons opened the meeting, and the task force voted unanimously to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. Simmons then asked Leslie Taito, Director of Regulatory and Quality Management for the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation to discuss her work around the state to standardize online permitting practices.

Ms. Taito said she has been working on state-level regulatory reform, and specifically working with the state Building Official and Fire Marshall to map their permitting processes. She said that she believes that it is important to address these issues with municipalities, as well. She is currently working with Pawtucket and other communities on permitting, and would like to work with the entire task force to develop customer-centric reform that standardizes practices across the state.

Mr. McJennett asked how the state would enforce municipal compliance with the initiative.

Ms. Taito said that there were currently no plans to punish nonparticipants. She reiterated the importance of reform at the local level, as many businesses have pointed to local processes as the most onerous.

Mr. Grazcykowski asked how the state planned to treat communities, such as East Providence, that have already invested in such systems.

Ms. Taito said it is important not to punish forward-thinking communities. She sees opportunities to build off of the successes of such communities, and believes that those communities could be brought into the statewide system at their convenience – for instance, at the end of their current license agreements.

Mr. Grazcykowski said he was involved in a similar initiative in Connecticut. He said it involved a great deal of work, especially involving data collection and cleaning, but that the value-added of such a tool is worth the effort. He said the initiative should increase transparency and efficiency.

Mr. Simmons said that there is a great deal of interest in the initiative across the state from many different stakeholders. He asked all task force members to advocate for the initiative with state leaders to help beyond the appropriation the state dedicated to the study.

Mr. Grazykowski East Providence's system had solved a lot of issues, and that he'd open the city's system and information up to Ms. Taito.

Mr. McJennett said that Central Falls would be interested in the initiative.

Ms. Taito emphasized the importance of standardizing processes and forms.

Ms. Greschner asked how many more communities Ms. Taito could support.

Ms. Taito said she is currently close to capacity, but the department is looking to hire more staff.

Mr. Simmons said RIPEC is interested in helping with the initiative. The task force then thanked Ms. Taito for her efforts and joining the meeting.

Mayor Grebien said the process has already been very valuable for Pawtucket and will help them find increase efficiencies moving forward.

The task force moved on to the regional refuse bid, and received a letter from David Clemente, Pawtucket's Purchasing Agent, detailing the bid process in answer to concerns voiced by Mr. Burns from Council 94 at the previous meeting.

The task force then received a proposal from Mr. Clemente on joint purchasing between Pawtucket and East Providence. Mayor Grebien and Mr. Grazykowski agreed to hold meetings in the coming weeks to finalize the details. Mayor Grebien requested RIPEC's involvement, and Mr. Simmons said RIPEC was eager to help.

Ms. Greschner then updated the task force on the regional public safety dispatch initiative. The state police are the lead agency on the project and are inventorying systems and operations.

Mayor Grebien said Newport's manager, Jane Howington, is interested in joining the group.

Mr. Simmons suggested that the police send out an update to the participating communities.

Ms. Greschner said she'd pass along Mayor Grebien and Mr. Simmons' comments. She said the timetable was unclear, at present. She then moved on to discuss regional assessment. She and Mr. Simmons had attended the Assessors Association meeting Thursday morning. They discussed the idea and had positive feedback from the group. Many concerns were also voiced, but overall she felt it was a productive conversation. The assessors presented additional ideas, and the organization's executive board committed to working with the task force.

Mr. Simmons discussed the previously identified test group of East Greenwich, Cranston, and Barrington, who are all up for full revaluations, and how the assessors had a different thought that the bid could be countywide. Under this structure, work would be done on a rotating basis relative to the state's existing revaluation schedule. A company that is currently doing this in

Connecticut said that the initiative is working to reduce costs and upgrade service levels. Another individual in attendance had had similar success in New York State.

Mr. Grazcykowski said he thinks the idea is valuable and has worked well elsewhere.

Mr. Simmons asked that the task force members support the idea, and that it could become a statewide initiative with widespread benefits.

Mayor Grebien raised the concern of adversely influencing competition by crowding out smaller companies.

Mr. Simmons said that by following the refuse bid model, and bidding separately and regionally, communities could make sure they get the best price from companies.

Mayor Grebien believes it is the right thing to do and will be worth the hard work.

Mr. Grazcykowski sees this as an opportunity to standardize practices and processes. There are concerns about software differences across cities, as information systems are critical.

Mr. Simmons said some vendors work on multiple systems and may be able to meet such needs. He said that joint bidding on info. systems should also be explored. He also mentioned one assessor's idea about legislation that would allow communities to go out for nine-year bids to bring consistency and possibly reduce prices.

Mr. Grazcykowski asked about interest in joint bidding on an ERP system and what the process would be.

Mr. Simmons suggested that a proposal be sent to all RI communities to join with East Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls as they go out to bid jointly for a system.

Mayor Grebien moved to have the task force endorse joint bidding for an ERP and to reach out to other communities via RIPEC.

Mr. Grazcykowski also wanted to gauge interest in an equipment sharing agreement for large equipment, such as bucket trucks and other vehicles that communities don't always need on a full-time basis. Joint purchases of this equipment could be a part of the agreement, as well.

Mayor Grebien agreed it should be explored and moved to endorse the development of a capital asset sharing agreement including joint bidding and purchasing.

There was no public comment. The next meeting was set for Thursday, January 17, 2013 at 1:00pm in East Providence.

The task force adjourned.