

Vermont Governance for the 21st Century

A Retreat for the Boards of

Vermont League of Cities and Towns
The Vermont School Boards Association
Vermont Superintendents Association

November 3rd 2009

Introduction

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Vermont School Boards Association, and Vermont Superintendents Association cooperated to produce this meeting to consider current local governance structures in Vermont, examine common challenges, and begin a process to envision improvements. *The Vermont Council on Rural Development* helped structure the event and served as neutral facilitator of the process.

The three sponsoring organizations recognize the importance of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of local organization while preserving and enhancing local community empowerment. Opening statements outlined a set of problems before local governance in Vermont: There is an erosion of local decision-making from state and federal practices and mandates; the multiplicity of local and regional governance structures and their historical accretion leads to overlaps, 'interest-based' governance, and undue complexity; local volunteers can't staff the innumerable boards (--are we using local human capital wisely?); resource shortages make the system un-sustainable; efficiencies require new solutions. There is a concern that unless local leadership steps up to define new models of governance, top-down governance structures for schools, and further incremental mandates to municipalities will be imposed that will be counterproductive, inefficient and onerous to communities. If keeping decisions as local as possible makes for better decisions and stronger communities how do we strengthen local governance in the face of current challenges in ways that increase its effectiveness, accountability and prudent use of resources?

Goals and Action Choices

Changes in local governance in Vermont should improve and contribute to more efficient municipal and school services to Vermont communities—at a scale that maximizes public participation. Local governance should be strengthened as the single best way of advancing the Vermont’s ideal for government “of, by, and for the people.” Keeping government close to the people maintains democracy, builds a feeling of obligation to mutual service, and improves accountability. Today, governance needs to improve in several ways: Vermont needs to resolve the problems associated with overlapping geographic lines and the multiplicity of sometimes un-accountable local and regional boards. Stronger local governance can allow a more balanced partnership with state government, rather than a top down model that frustrates local aspiration and undermines local leadership.

The lists of Short Term Actions and Long Term Directions below are aggregated ideas from the meeting that are presented as potential choices for action in the near term and for potential long term direction of mutual efforts. The Summit session ended with the suggestion that a joint committee (or committees) works through such a list to choose priorities for action, or that the entire group reconvenes to review alternatives, make decisions and set direction for action.

Potential Short Term Action Choices

Partner in Local Governance Day

The VSBA, VSA and VLCT should participate together as equals in leading Local Governance Day at the Vermont Legislature in 2010 and annually in future. This day could share issues from each organization and a common platform of work developed from the choices and potential priorities in this report.

Build Town/School Budget Collaboration

Towns and Schools in each municipality should collaborate in budget development and present a united front for their annual budget adoption process.

Expand Volunteers in Schools

Schools should use local human and business resources in and out of the school to expand curriculum, community based learning, and the exposure of students to world of work.

Share Staff and Resources

In addition to potentials for joint purchasing, towns and schools could share back office and other staff support, book-keeping and other effective staff. Local plans for town/school collaboration should be developed.

Use Policy Governance for Schools

Systematically expand the use of policy governance so that school boards lead all policy decisions for their district, leaving day-to-day and operational management to their paid staff.

Enable Citizen Budget Committees

Citizen Budget Advisory Committees of local residents could be developed to help schools and municipalities prepare budgets, and then serve as ambassadors for budgets in the community.

Convene VSBA/VLCT/VSA Working Group or Reconvene Summit

a. Set up a joint committee of members of the sponsoring organizations to make strategic choices among the opportunities for action listed here and bring them back to their boards for decisions and common effort. OR, b. Reconvene participants from the Governance Summit to make choices and set common direction.

Potential Mid-Term Action Choices

Build a Cost/Benefit Model of School Governance

Vermont needs a research tool to help local school districts evaluate the fiscal, educative and community costs and benefits of consolidation. Science-based research should be digested for use by local citizens and school leaders.

Share Models and Best Practices

Not all districts (or municipalities) will seek full consolidation with their neighbors: a best-practices examination of local/regional efficiency practices for shared services, sharing staff, aggregated purchasing, collaborative infrastructure development (and so on) is needed. A guide or web tool should be developed for sharing successes and evaluating opportunities for collaboration.

Change School Governance

Supervisory Unions and School District layers of governance are duplicative. Eliminate one.

Improve VT AOT Collaboration with Municipalities

AOT should work with municipal highway departments to leverage lower costs for materials and equipment, and spur efficiencies.

Encourage Municipal Consolidations

Build financial incentives to neighboring towns that merge to expand efficiencies and effectiveness. Provide state encouragement to eliminate villages and other incorporated municipal districts within towns.

Potential Long Term Directions

Convene a Constitutional Convention

Vermont needs to undertake a systematic analysis of the roles and responsibilities of governance, returning to the “layer cake” of federalism where roles, responsibility and accountability are rationally delineated. Toward that end, an Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations should establish a plan to be clarified, adopted and propelled through a Vermont Constitutional Convention.

Remodel and Remap Vermont’s Local and Regional Governance System

Regional collaboration around a range of services from schools to ambulance, solid waste and planning should be re-organized into “multi-municipal” or “multi-school” collaborative regions. A new plan for regional governance should be development that coordinates services to achieve economy of scale but preserving and strengthening local participation in governance. Standardize these new regions; eliminate the 246 towns and 300-plus school governments; create 30 to 40 new entities to unite municipal and school responsibilities, and devolve from state government authority all other governance appropriate to the regional and local scale. As Vermonters, we need to expand our notion of local leadership beyond the borders of towns, school districts and other local and regional governance institutions and remap local governance for the future.

Establish Home Rule and Outlaw Unfunded Mandates

Vermont should pass an amendment to its constitution (possibly at the Convention described above) to establish Home Rule, whereby anything not expressly prohibited to local governance is left the province to local governance, and where unfunded mandates from state or federal government are prohibited.

Centralize Special Education at the State Level

Take these costs off local taxpayers and put them in the general fund—provide unified and rational services to support the progress of special needs children.

Develop Multi-Use Plans for Under-Used School Buildings

The decline in student population provides an opportunity to re-conceive how we use school buildings as public buildings, community centers, and/or municipal offices. Districts

and Unions throughout Vermont could organize planning processes for concentrating community functions into these public places.

Change Town Meeting Date

Change the date of Town Meeting to mid-Summer so that state fiscal figures, state tax rates, student performance scores and other data is available to support rational decision-making by voters. Then make it a State Holiday.

Unite Vermont Schools Under a Single District

Build a single school district for the entire state of Vermont, governed by a single board of education.

Governance Summit Minutes

November 3rd 2009

Why Discuss Municipal and School Governance Together

VCRD: Reporting Council on the Future of VT Conclusions

Paul Costello, VCRD: Rationalizing government service territories was one of the conclusions of the Council on the Future of Vermont.

VLCT: Challenges in Today's System of Municipal Governance, Steve Jeffrey

Steve Jeffrey, VLCT: Our two entities have a lot in common but we continue to operate like 2 ships sailing in the fog: we share property tax-payers, and voters. We share geographic boundaries that were set 250 years ago; we need to look at whether geographic set up is the proper one going forward keeping in mind that we don't want to segment how we provide services. Local governments are under a lot of stress. They are told by federal and state government what they have to do which erodes decision-making. The tax base is being eroded with Act 60. It's time to reorganize to make for better stronger local government. Participatory democracy is the best kind of government. There are 5,000 municipal officials across the state, positions with a lot of responsibility, that are getting more technical and time consuming, and it's harder to get people to serve. There has been a decline in town meeting participation. With these challenges, and our current economic times, it's a good time to look at where to go in future.

VSA and VSBA: School Governance; Change and Impediments

John Nelson, VSBA: Features of education governance that is unique in the state: 1) it's the only service specifically mentioned and mandated in the Vermont Constitution (for the civic reasons of increasing virtue and preventing vice, rather than for their future economic success). 2) The general assembly of the State gets to decide the education system making change more difficult. 3) The partnership between state and local governing entities is unique. Over time the general assembly has created several structures: 262 town school districts, 35 union schools, 2 interstate school districts, 12 supervisory districts, 46 supervisory unions. The system is pretty flexible, local people can make decisions, but it's a difficult system to manage: multiple policies within an area, multiple contracts, etc. We are challenged to think about how we do things differently. 4) There has been a growing federal influence on education. 37 years ago there was no US Department of Education, no "special education." We're heading toward national standards and national assessments. Vermont ranks high in terms of standards and we spend a lot on education in Vermont. There is an expanding role in meeting social service needs being placed in schools for medical, social, food, etc. The high cost per pupil will continue to be a problem. Declining enrollment is important; fewer people having kids in school means they don't have the direct connections with it. Theory of the Commons says that when it comes to public resources, the stewardship of those resources is improved when it's governed by people affected rather than a more distant entity (state and federal). Need to retain that local connection of stewardship to our schools in the future.

Jeffrey Francis, VSA: The superintendents are interested in what can they do in terms of changing governance structure to create a more effective education system? 80% of superintendents are in support of revision to governance model. Government structures are under pressure. Public education systems are increasingly being asked to do more with less. Looking to state government to provide answers would be ill advised. The superintendents are interested in how to foster and facilitate change.

SWOT Analysis on the Current System of Local Governance

Strengths

- The fact that we have a lot of civil dialogue means we take more time to explore issues.
- Diversity of feedback from the public ensures looking at issues from all angles.
- Participatory process leads to transparency.
- The process builds community by being local and in touch with the ground.
- People closest to problems are most heavily involved.
- Quality of service provided is high because it's municipal.
- We, who serve, know who we're serving; a correlation between those serving and those being served fosters a greater appreciation with what governance is supposed to provide.
- We're elected locally and directly responsible to the people.
- We vote every year, a turn over of people can bring fresh ideas and when change is needed, you can make the change; accountability.
- People who serve on boards are building skills that are transferable to other boards.
- Cost effective because most of us are free; free labor of volunteers.
- It's personal; we deal with people face to face.
- There's trust.
- Absence of political party identification.
- We don't need a lot of technical expertise because we're small; can get away without technicians do everything.
- The association between institutional memory and technical strength: having familiarity with the community helps make good decisions; innate sense of knowing how things work.
- Maintenance of tradition over time is held more tightly at the local level preventing fads; innate tradition and connection to community keeps us from swinging too far from who we are.
- Ability that we can quickly adapt and adjust; nimbleness. Flexibility of response means you can tailor solutions to the place.
- Scale is small; ability to focus, because we can attack smaller problems with fewer variables. Can be more effective in problem-solving locally pertinent issues rather than being directed by global issues from the outside. (i.e., setting a local calendar rather than building a statewide calendar, which is hard)
- Communication benefits; with the quantity of people involved, there are more boards and people on boards getting to learn the issues to disseminate to others in the community.
- There are a limited number of management levels, and managers are close to the people doing the work.
- Redundancy builds in a fail safe; i.e., by providing local road care or fire services in each town, there's a bigger pool to call on when we face a larger problem.
- Generally coterminous boundaries – municipal and school are usually the same in many cases.
- We have a lot of options in terms of how we organize ourselves; organize according to what you want out of your government system. Having a menu to choose from allows for flexibility.
- Lots of opportunities for towns and school to cooperate.
- People have high expectations for both municipal and school governance.
- The fact that there are a lot of districts leads to innovation to explore models; more experimentation can happen, people can try things and look at what works.
- Having an overarching organization does help local boards understand and implement various policies. State organizations give guidance that would cost small schools a lot of money, i.e., legal advice to comply with various regulations, etc.

Weaknesses

- Don't have as much control as we want; the existing system gives us a false sense of local control.
- We're creatures of the state; we can do what they tell us and only that. In theory, we can control curriculum but in practice we can't, which leads to frustration.
- We have more control than we exercise; people are unwilling to make changes and it's difficult to get people willing to lead.
- Local governance doesn't have the political clout at the state level. Our separate structures (SBA, PA) make us weak politically; since we don't have a unified voice it allows the general assembly to pick and choose who they want to listen to.
- Past practice limits innovation; we're often bound by what has come before which limits us in what we can do in the future. People say "we tried that," or "that's not how we've always done it."
- Confusion in rolls and responsibilities of school board members, administrators. Who gets to make the decisions? School boards feel they are responsible to the students but what about the knowledge that the administrators have? And because it's small, it's very personal.
- Change is made based on personalities sometimes rather than what's best.
- The current model is economically unsustainable over time; we don't have enough resources to pay for what we want.
- Ability to pay drives the discussion: "Can we pay for it?" More and more we feel like we can't, which is the challenge.
- It's hard to reconcile the needs with the funds that are available; it's difficult to get the funds necessary to carry out the functions of the school.
- There is variability of resources available between towns.
- Certain kinds of programs are financially impossible in a smaller school. Opportunities are lost because we don't have the capacity to provide the services or expertise we'd like because of our small scale: how many schools have gifted programs, for example.
- Overhead costs are often high and deployment of resources is often inefficient. For example, our district has 3 schools w/in 10 miles that used to serve 400 kids, and now serve 200 kids.
- There are conflicting objectives between the Selectboard and the school: the Selectboards major objective is to keep the tax rate down, the school objective is to provide the best education. The school principal or board will say we have to spend the money because it's for the children.
- Our current system over-relies on property tax to fund both systems, which breeds conflict.
- There's a disconnect between schools and property tax; $\frac{3}{4}$ of our property taxes are for schools, yet the schools are not involved in the collection of delinquent taxes. Also, you can close a school completely and people would still pay the same property tax.
- Act 60 went in the wrong direction. Selectboards used to set school tax rate, now it's set by the state. That fact leads to less discussion between school boards and Selectboards.
- He who controls the purse strings is the OZ behind the curtain. It's not transparent to the community; hands are tied because the state and federal levels control the money.
- We often focus on the symptoms and not the root causes; the symptom being high property taxes, the cause being that we don't have an economic development strategy in state. We put energy into fighting the symptom rather than the cause.
- There are redundancies and inefficiencies; our sizes are so small that individuals supposed to provide leadership have to develop expertise in so many areas that they don't develop any expertise. i.e., curriculum director has to have direct knowledge in math, social studies, science, etc. The push is to provide all of that.

- The number of boards in one community leads to a lot of amateurs on boards; people can get on without a lot of voter scrutiny because they're the only one running.
- The elected officials are not experts; there's a huge learning curve for the volunteers who serve to learn how the town or school is run and it takes awhile to be effective. Technical requirements outstrip layperson capacity or skills.
- Some services can't easily be provided locally: public transit, waste collection, police; it's difficult for municipalities to deliver services unless they work with other municipalities.
- Solutions stop at our borders; we can only affect change in our little piece of Vermont.
- Organizations lose good people because there is no place for them to grow within the organization, no career paths because of their small size.
- People spend too much time micromanaging organizations they serve and in areas they have expertise, not necessarily where it's needed.
- Personal nature of a local system makes it more difficult to make decisions. Most people on school boards have kids in school, so their solutions are driven more by what they know rather than looking from the 10,000 ft level. Also the personal nature makes for potential conflict of interest: don't want to lay off relatives, etc.
- Deference to parochial interests; local decisions often lead to parochialism in the ability to obtain goods and services. We want to keep money in the community so bad decisions are made in the interest in keeping it local.
- Lack of expectation of communication between school and municipality; there's no time or ability to do that.
- Technical things get in way of towns and schools working together. So much red tape from state can prevent or undermine collaboration. The statute discourages collaboration; mostly tied to the funding. Municipalities and schools don't look at how to pool resources.
- Needing to have "educational credentials" prevents people that have expertise from being able to come into the schools. Legal walls and regulatory barriers limit volunteers teaching or offering their services to a school; i.e., can't have a college professor teach at the school because they're not licensed for K-12. For that reason, Schoolboards may not attract local contractors at better rates as much as a Selectboard might.

Opportunities

- This meeting and this discussion is an opportunity; this dialog should be ongoing.
- Economic situation we're in gets people to come together to look at opportunities and think of new solutions.
- Our economic times are an opportunity. Everyone is comfortable with small schools but if we can't pay for them, we have to look for different ways to pay for them.
- Technology; 21st century classrooms using broadband and the internet for geographically isolated communities and building a new classroom that offers programs that currently can't be delivered: gifted services, languages not offered in your school, etc.
- State provides flexibility for change and opportunities to consider consolidation of school districts.
- There has been a lack of cohesive leadership at state level to develop what we want to accomplish in education. We decry the lack of direction, but it could be seen as an opportunity for local leadership to make decisions and come up with new ideas for collaboration.
- An opportunity to expand our notion of local beyond the borders established in the 1720s. When we're preparing kids to operate in a global society and we're still talking of the

boundaries of our local towns, we're missing the mark.

- Partnership opportunities to share strategies and resources between schools and towns.
- Municipal energy committees are currently working closer with schools – is there a way to foster those kinds of relationships around other issue areas.
- There could be cooperation between towns and schools in purchasing and providing service.
- The declining student population provides an opportunity to re-service our facilities and make them more relevant to their communities: use the facilities in a broader way for the community.
- The overlap in transportation services provides an opportunity. Coordinating transit of schools, municipalities and public systems could save a lot of money for schools.
- Opportunities to partner around highly effective personnel. For example, a back office

business that is strong could partner with a neighboring supervisory union with a weak back office. Could offer incentives for partnerships.

- There's an ability to partner with districts that are far away because of advances in technology. Not sure local has to become bigger, but it has to partner in more innovative ways.
- We have an opportunity to use more local human and business resources in the school, and harness volunteerism for individual projects, for example.
- State of VT AOT doesn't play well with municipalities or others in district area. There are opportunities for local garages of AOT to work with local town highway departments. Municipalities could get together for purchasing at better cost.
- Presenting a united front to the community in service to town needs and interests.

Threats

- Unfunded federal state and national mandates; GASB for example (Government Accounting Standards Board).
- Compartmentalization of government services; i.e., a regional transportation model with a separate entity to provide school, municipal and public transportation and all of a sudden the only thing they care about is transit, leading to less decision-making in the big scheme; a silo mentality instead of systems way of looking at it.
- Privatization; privatizing services that have traditionally been public might affect service. i.e., lunches done from outside may lead to cost-cutting and less nutritional meals being served.
- A concern that government structures will be imposed on us that are counterproductive, inefficient and onerous. People won't know how to operate these new kinds of government structures; it could be a painful learning experience to make them work. There

has to be a pathway and gradual way of moving forward and good leadership.

- Change is unsettling and hard.
- The underfunded state pension plan and the potential of moving the teacher's pension to property tax and out of state fund.
- Overreliance on property tax to fund education.
- Administrative effect on school district, various laws prevent school districts from raising funds so school boards can't provide the services. Threat of outside interference on local capacity.
- Perceived urgency could induce careless decision-making. The 2-year election cycle political structure makes legislators think they need to look like they are doing something.
- Misinformation being disseminated from people in high places to tie in to sense of urgency and rush decisions. Half the story gets told.
- Unfair assumption of bad motives makes it hard to talk to each other.

- Apathy and lack of feeling of obligation to serve and solve problems at the municipal and school level. "It's someone else's job"
- Apathetic, uninformed, and overused voters.
- Concentration of high poverty families and children in high service need towns.
- Aging demographics; may not have economy to support services we've come to like.
- The national debt.
- Potential to pit one entity against another; i.e., Act 60 led to increased scrutiny on local school budgets against municipal budgets.
- State regulations (yellow bus, certification, etc) prevent us from using resources economically.
- Huge inertia in school system. Hard to make substantial change. People are risk averse, conservative, don't want to offend each other, and don't want to do anything that would mess up learning of students now.
- Life will not be better for our children. Kids moving off of the farm, out of Vermont, local democracy will be changed forever.
- Lack of immigrant mentality; people aren't willing to do whatever is necessary so kids will have a better life; people don't have same willingness to sacrifice.
- Declining enrollment.
- Influence of big labor impedes the nimbleness of the system response; same goes for influence of our governance structure.
- Suspicion between school boards and _____
- Everyone here knows there's a threat and we may not be able to respond to it before someone else does it for us. We're not organized, bottom up takes longer, don't have tools to push it through. Threat from top down action that could happen before we take action.

Brainstorming Ways Forward: *Are there ways to respond to weaknesses and overcome threats by modifying existing systems of governance?*

- Centralize special education at state level; move it off property tax and put it in general fund. Don't really have local control over those anyway because needs are so specialized. Could rely on broader groups of resource providers that are employed rather than contracted. Provide unified rational services to special needs kids.
- The confusion over roles and responsibilities on school side it's caused by unclear delegation of powers in statutes. There is a possibility to improve that by making roles more clear for supervisory unions and school boards. We have to decide whether we want to take that risk of reviewing roles and responsibilities. It would take legislation to do it and agreement from entities on what needs to be done.
- 2 models of federalism: layer cake federalism with distinct roles and responsibilities; marble cake federalism where everyone has their fingers in the pie. Maybe building and returning to a "layer cake" federalism, where we systematically align the roles and responsibilities of layers of government, would build accountability. Rationally look at the different layers and look at what's delegated to local government as creatures of the state through this process.
- Been tried and failed but here it is: Set up an Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) – national entity (created by Nixon, axed by Clinton) implemented by a number of states. A different dimension for involving state in conversation.
- Have a Constitutional Convention. The framers of our constitution would not have thought we would have gone this long without one.
- Work together to get constitutional amendment against unfunded mandates. Require people that think a government service is good be responsible to pay for it.
- Establish home rule in Vermont where local governments can pass any laws they want as long as they're not unconstitutional.
- Reexamine the way education works at the state level and the state education governance. Currently the state board doesn't have a cabinet position like all of the other services in

Vermont. There might be a state role in serving the regions.

- Change school governance: convert supervisory unions to supervisory districts. Eliminate local school boards and have one board for the entire state. It would clear up the problem with lack of volunteers to serve and the issue of roles and responsibilities.
- Deliberate examination of local/regional processes for efficiency and effectiveness. Wide arrays of successful partnerships already exist but aren't being put into place statewide. i.e., in S. Burl the municipal library is in the school.
- A way to facilitate collaboration; i.e., 4 towns that want to share a skating ring, the effort in Ludlow to use municipal transportation system to provide bussing. The kind of thinking that isn't in place currently.
- Budget timing is entirely off – don't know health insurance costs at time of building budgets or NECAP scores in time to get into town report for town meeting. Towns not being able to set tax rate without all the info. Can we change our timing to get good info so local boards can make decisions they need.
- School boards aren't getting at the high levels of dealing with change and innovation. Clarify the role of boards away from being micro-managers toward becoming trustees.
- Regional services: all towns in Lamoille county looking across region on how to cut costs. Elephant in room is fire dept that sits idle 95% of the time but try to take that away... Not happening systematically.
- Locals sometimes can't see what's important and how something might work differently. Data on efficiencies needs to come from a higher level. There isn't a place to go for those models of towns that are dealing with efficiencies.
- Data informs our thinking yet a lot of efforts and studies done about combining school districts but when it comes down to it, the initiatives have failed. We struggle to understand the human side of making the change.
- Should there be an expectation that you get the same services in each district and how does governance interrelate with that.
- Spend a lot of time talking about how we want to be different. Not sure we're clear on the why we want to be different. What will regionalization produce in terms of an outcome: will it save money and if so, how much, is it worth the effort... Be clear on what it's actually going to mean. If we can articulate the why we may have more sway with the legislature.
- Lack of consensus in the science out there. Show me an example of consolidation that saved money. What they've found is that it's done nothing but increase administrative costs, etc. If we're going to consolidate, let's not do it on the myth that it will save money if it doesn't. We need some independent respected truthizer, academia or the Brookings Institute, someone to put together a statement about the benefits and costs so we can have a statewide dialog around the best findings in these key issues.
- Notion that regionally we could do better in delivering services better than the way the state is delivering services now. In what areas, how, is it true?
- Scientific research needs to be carried out before we know the end outcome; we should be able to say measurably this is what we want to see at the outcome.
- Need a clearinghouse of research on these significant issues: a combination of the different organizations identifying the issues and members identifying research that's pertinent to those issues.
- UVM starting Jeffords Center for Research – could be a think-tank approach to be able to extract research. That's a trusteeship role for every board, not day to day management.
- Need a way to present a united front and increase our level of influence in state governance. The 3 organizations represented here could come together around local governance issues and clearly articulate our common interests and organize the data in a way that would be meaningful moving

forward. Maybe that's work we need to do to move forward to gain awareness of larger issues that would help us increase our ability to drive change and policy.

- Superintendents have defined quality of education for children in Vermont. Maybe each entity could draft their statements and

then add them up in terms of how we address it and what can be done.

- A group of all 3 of our organizations could be formed help us define those things – a couple members from each organization to meet to come out with resolutions or shared focus.

Goals that could be accomplished with new models of local governance

- Schoolboards, Selectboards, town managers regularly engage in discussion.
- Develop and articulate unified positions to present a sustainable model.
- Better understanding from people we serve, establish what those measures are in each location, what's the scorecard for success in each location; pointed toward efficiency and effectiveness.
- Provide more services for the same amount of money.
- Stakeholder satisfaction level of board members.
- The best government Vermont can develop is one that is "of, by and for the people." Advance the best governance possible to meet that.
- Keep alive the democratic part of governance where people feel obliged to participate.
- Increased willingness to serve in local government
- Reduce any competition between schools and towns asking for money.
- Development of a partnership with state and local government rather than from the top down.
- Improved accountability at all levels; policy focus for Selectboards and Schoolboards to come together in the development of their budgets – or a single budget: a working relationship between equals.
- Be proactive on regional opportunity rather than reactive. To initiate partnerships around viable areas and be proactive around collaborations.
- Resolve the problems associated with overlapping geographic lines.

New Models of Local Governance: *Are there alternative models for local governance that Vermont should consider that would achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness, foster positive leadership and empower democratic participation by community residents?*

- Maybe have one governing body over the school and municipal governance; an opportunity for coordination that wouldn't be competing with each other.
- As part of the budgeting process, set up a Citizens Budget Advisory Committee familiar with details who can talk with Selectboard or school budget members and also communicate the issues to the community.
- Regional collaboration around the whole range of services or call it "multi-municipal" or "multi-school" collaboration since region implies geographic proximity.
- Set up a county wide government for coordination of services with an economy of scale not achievable at town level.
- Standardize the regions across VT
- Protocols to get service into areas about issues of common interest: seniors might use school buses for transportation.
- Eliminate the 246 towns, 300+ school districts and create 30-40 new local governments. Strike a balance between participatory democracy and being too large. With some of the state services as well.
- All officers elected in these regions should be at-large, rather than towns sending representatives, and all be volunteers.

- Transfer the ownership, maintenance and operation for physical assets held by school systems to the municipalities, thereby reducing school budgets and narrowing the focus of the mission of school to education of kids. Town of Milton runs the financial operation of the school there. Could be vice versa. Towns do all the financials of the school district.
- Transfer all of the school assets and buildings to the state, with the caveat that the state doesn't have the authority to close them. (A mandate the other way).
- Make Town Meeting Day a state holiday. Do away with Australian ballot and require people to attend town meeting so they have access to accurate information.
- New Zealand and Australia mandated local governance consolidation.
- In Australia, they fine you if you don't vote, and the funds raised, fund the election.
- Changing the constitution to enable towns and schools to do anything that isn't prohibited (home rule).
- A pool of money that could be put out into open market – allow towns discretion to invest school funds.
- Give people who participate in civic service some reduction on their income tax liability; maybe a line on their income tax return. Having a financial benefit for serving on a board may induce people to run for public position.
- Convene a meeting like this one during legislative session so there's cross-pollination during session and meet the general assembly on its own turf.
- Come up with common platform positions that could be presented to the legislature.
- Consolidating towns, that would organically develop.
- Extend the Governor's term to 4 years.
- Local governance work on local issues, not broader issues.
- Give towns a financial incentive to consolidate with a statewide reduction in tax rate of both towns that consolidate.
- Assignment of responsibilities to local entities and their governance structures.
- Eliminate one of the boards: supervisory union board or the local school board – don't need both.
- Eliminate villages or incorporated districts that are subsets of towns to reduce redundancy.
- State have one school district run by a single board of education that has responsibility for all school systems (Hawaii).
- There are 18 districts operating under a policy governance model rather than a traditional model. Institute policy governance for all school boards so they operate on the trustee level rather than the day-to-day operations level.
- Pushing regional services up to the state; look at where services should be run and move some to the state level.
- Rewrite education funding law; the structures would follow a change in the law; get rid of Act 60 and 68 – start fresh.

Structural Next Steps in the Dialogue on Local Governance

A. What should be done to share the issues from today's dialogue for broader consideration by constituents and partners?

- Need a report that provides all info we talked about today that is vetted by this group.
- Reconvene this group to discuss the report that comes out of today; could do aggregation exercise.
- Expanding local government conversation at the legislature.
- Keep communication lines open. Form a small committee of these 3 groups.
- Should the Regional Planning Commissions be part of this discussion as a way of reaching out to more people? They already collaborate with neighboring towns.

B. Should our organizations set short or middle term actions to begin to envision change, and platform potential models of governance for the future?

- Push for Town Meeting Day as a holiday.
- SBA could share the work they've done for 7 years around governance with others that are here today.
- Smaller delegations of the organizations here today get together to start some of the substantive discussions around movement of some of these issues and to focus our efforts and explore areas where we do not agree: roles and responsibilities; relationships of school board and superintendents; greater role of municipalities in school facilities.
- Set action groups in different areas that are strategic.
- Let the public know that our three groups have met around this issue. Representatives of boards, associations, etc, just let networks know that this is underway.
- Look at the statutes that govern local cooperation to make it as easy as possible to make it happen; eliminate barriers and create incentives.
- Introduce home rule legislation and a statewide referendum for people to vote on at town meeting: expanding collaboration possibilities and changing power relationships from state.

Participants

Vermont League of Cities and Town representatives:

- Bob Kiss, Mayor, Burlington
- Sandy Harris, Town Clerk, Vernon
- Tammy Legacy, Town Clerk, Roxbury
- Eric Osgood, Selectboard Chair, Johnson
- Bob Rusten, Town Manager, Wilmington
- Sandy Miller, Town manager, Milton and
- Ted Simmons, Selectboard Member, Orwell

Vermont School Board Association representatives:

- Kalee Roberts, Hyde Park
- Carl Groppe, Stockbridge
- Larry Kraft, Springfield
- Kristin Bristow, Vergennes Union High School
- G. Miller, Essex Junction
- Emily Long, Leland & Gray High School
- Ed Hemmer, Shrewsbury
- Ken Fredette, Wallingford
- Junius Calitri, Cornwall
- Peter Herman, Thetford Academy
- David Cyprian, VSBA/VSA/VPA Legislative Analyst

Vermont Superintendents Association representatives:

- Jeff Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association
- David Cyprian, Analyst, Vermont Principals, School Boards and Superintendents Associations
- John Everitt, Superintendent, South Burlington School District
- Johanna Harpster, Superintendent, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union
- Brent Kay, Superintendent, Orange Southwest Supervisory Union
- Tom O'Brien, Superintendent, Addison Northwest Supervisory Union
- Frank Perotti, Superintendent, Springfield School District
- Steve Urgenson, Superintendent, Orleans Central Supervisory Union
- Robert Rosane, Superintendent, Franklin Central Supervisory Union
- Elaine Pinckney, Superintendent, Chittenden South Supervisory Union
- Ken Page, Executive Director, Vermont Principals' Association also attended



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