

Municipal Self-Governance Program - S.106
Testimony of Brattleboro Town Manager Peter Elwell
Before the Senate Government Operations Committee
February 20, 2019

GENERAL REASONS TO SUPPORT LIMITED TEST CASES OF MUNICIPAL SELF-GOVERNANCE IN VERMONT:

LOW RISK: The State would supervise the test and decide whether or not it was successful. The State's Municipal Self-Governance Commission would determine the scope of each participating town's authority.

INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY: Locally agreed upon solutions to address locally identified needs with locally transparent results would promote greater accountability to the people we serve.

GREATER EFFICIENCY: Participating municipalities would be freed from the restrictive and unproductive "scramble through the statutes" that is currently required to justify municipal action to address emergent problems or opportunities in our communities.

PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS: Vermont's experiment would be a modified version of the very successful experience in West Virginia during the past 10 years.

PRELIMINARY LIST OF AREAS IN WHICH THE TOWN OF BRATTLEBORO BELIEVES OUR TOWN GOVERNMENT COULD FUNCTION MORE EFFICIENTLY AND PROVIDE SERVICES MORE EFFECTIVELY IF THE STATE ALLOWED CITIES AND TOWNS TO OPERATE IN A MORE NIMBLE AND INNOVATIVE MANNER:

On-Street Parking

Speed Limits, Stop Signs, and Other Traffic Regulations

General Obligation Bonding for a Municipal Broadband Network

Extending Municipal Services to Neighboring Communities (if they want us to do that)

Collecting Fees and Fines

Reducing the Property Tax Burden and More Fairly Distributing the Cost of Services

(85% of Town revenue is from property taxes and 20% of property in Brattleboro is tax exempt)

(Our preference here is to have freedom to adopt any revenue sources that are acceptable to Representative Town Meeting. If that is deemed to be too much authority, then we request authority to adopt a local option tax of 1% or more to be collected by the State with any revenue source that is already being collected by the State, subject to the usual 30% State "administrative fee.")

Property Tax Exemptions and PILOTS for Non-Profit Organizations who are Landowners

Establishing Fee Schedules for Locally Issued Permits, Licenses, and Vital Records

Resolving Tenant/Landlord Disputes

Enforcing State and Local Health and Safety Codes

Adopting and Enforcing Community Standards for Property Maintenance