

**January 26th, 2006
Meeting Minutes****Location**

2nd Floor Exhibit Room, Broome County Library, 185 Court Street, Binghamton, NY

Attendance

Constituent Members: Supervisor Debbie Preston, Town of Conklin; Supervisor Gordon Kniffen, Town of Kirkwood; Supervisor Ed Banks, Town of Fenton; Mayor Kevin Burke, Village of Port Dickinson; Deputy Mayor, Tarik Abdelazim, City of Binghamton; County Executive Barbara Fiala, Broome County; Supervisor Timothy Whitesell, Town of Binghamton; Supervisor John Bernardo, Town of Union; Supervisor Theodore Woodward, Town of Maine; Supervisor Scott Ellis, Town of Nanticoke; Supervisor Margaret Turna, Town of Chenango; Supervisor Ed Mosher, Town of Colesville; Supervisor Lois Dilworth, Town of Barker; Supervisor Peter Andreasen, Town of Vestal

Associate Members: Jim Dimascio, Greater Binghamton Coalition

Other Attendees: Darcy Fauci and Colleen Wagner, Broome County; Frank Kelly; Rita Petkash and Jeremy Evans, Broome County Department of Planning and Economic Development; Daria Golazeski, Village of Johnson City; Tom Johnson and Kirk Rapp, Village of Endicott; Joe Moody, Paul Nelson and Gary Leighton, Town of Union, Ron Keibel, Town of Chenango

Convene

Debbie Preston convened the meeting at 4:05PM. She asked everyone to sign the attendance sheet that would be passed around. She announced that Jim Dimascio [Executive Director of the Greater Binghamton Coalition] would give a presentation and that the Council would hear from a consultant [George Brigati] who has been working with the County on municipal insurance options.

Debbie then did a roll call to see which municipalities were represented. She announced that before proceeding to the other agenda items that representatives from the municipalities would receive bicentennial flags from the County. She turned the time over to Barbara Fiala, Broome County Executive.

Bicentennial flag presentation

Barbara thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and said that as part of the County's bicentennial celebration a flag was designed by Adam Lachmanski. The flags are made possible by Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo.

Barbara said that the bicentennial needs to be a community wide event and that a bicentennial committee was formed to plan bicentennial events. She introduced Ron Sall, a local businessman who is a member of the Bicentennial committee.

Ron Sall announced a number of events that had been scheduled including the Bicentennial ceremony on March 28th, the Bicentennial Ball on April 1st, the Bicentennial parade on June 3rd, the Greater Binghamton Air show on July 1st, and the Annual Pops on the Plaza scheduled for Fourth of July weekend. The Broome County Ethnic Festival will be held on October 20th and 21st.

Barbara said that she hopes that every municipality participates because it is a good way to showcase who you are and what you do. She wants the parade to be the largest that county has ever had. The committee has looked at centennial celebration pictures and is trying hard to recreate the nostalgia.

Barbara then distributed flags to representatives from the municipalities.

Economic Development Project Plan

Jim Dimascio, Executive Director of the Greater Binghamton Coalition, presented an Economic Development Project Plan to the Council.

The Project Plan is based on the recommendations of the BC Plan, completed in 2002. The Coalition has several economic development goals including establishing a single point of contact for economic development. There is also a multi stage marketing plan that will generate interest in doing business in Greater Binghamton. Based on the recommendations of the BC Plan the Coalition calls for focusing on several target industries including simulation, private health care, and distribution. The Economic Development Project Plan also consists of a capital projects plan that will improve infrastructure to attract business. Jim said that the focus of the capital projects plan is reclaiming brownfields. Redeveloping brownfields has many advantages since infrastructure is already in place at those sites and they occupy flat land in high visibility areas. Jim talked about the activities of Liberty County, Georgia, which has a dedicated funding source for economic development. Jim also reviewed the Gannett Press building project in Johnson City. It is an excellent example of brownfield and economic development. To create a dedicated funding source for marketing, Jim discussed the proposal to raise the hotel occupancy tax. He suggested that the capital projects plan be funded by increasing the sales tax by .25%. This funding would be used for acquiring and redeveloping brownfields, updating infrastructure, and promoting riverfront

development, among other things. Jim concluded by saying he was looking for feedback on the Plan.

Gordon Kniffen asked Jim when the plan would be put into action. Jim said that the Coalition hoped to spend six months presenting and tweaking the plan. Then sales and occupancy tax changes would go before the County legislature. If approved, the changes go to the State legislature for approval and then back to the County legislature for final approval.

Jim noted that they were not waiting to begin some activities such as development of the website.

Jim said that getting the necessary funding for the capital projects is difficult but important. He said that it is essential that reclaimed brownfield sites be in control of municipalities and economic development officials so that they can be redeveloped the way that the community wants.

Gordon asked if there would be an effort to secure grants in addition to any funding measures put in place and Jim said that that would be the case.

Debbie asked how long a reclaimed brownfield would be held while the community waited for the right opportunity. She added that she was worried that the community might not get the manufacturing or high tech business that we want. Jim responded that Greater Binghamton has not done a very good job of marketing itself and if marketing improves there is a better chance of getting what the community wants.

Tarik Abdelazim asked who would distribute the revenue that was collected and how it would be distributed. Jim answered that the county would collect the revenue and the Legislature would control whether or not to distribute funds to the economic development entity in charge of carrying out the plan.

Peter Andreasen asked what the timeline would be for results. Jim said that he hoped that within three years a significant brownfield site could be redeveloped. Peter responded that all of the municipalities have aging infrastructure that needs upgrading. He suggested that perhaps a portion of the revenue collected could go towards municipal infrastructure improvements. He also suggested that there needed to be an end date for the plan and the taxes.

Tim Whitesell asked Jim how much revenue would be generated with the proposed sales tax and occupancy tax increases. Jim responded that the occupancy tax would generate \$550,000 for marketing and running the single economic development entity and that the .25% sales tax would raise \$5 million annually for capital projects.

John Bernardo said that residents want small government and that perhaps the municipalities could forgo a portion of the sales tax revenue that they have been trying to reclaim from the county to help fund the effort.

Jim thanked everyone for listening to his presentation and for their comments. He urged everyone to continue providing feedback so that the plan can be refined and move forward. He said that he would like the opportunity to speak to residents and elected officials from all over Broome County.

[Recorder's note: At Jim's request his contact information has been included below. Anyone who would like him to present the Economic Development Project Plan to municipal leaders or the public should contact him. He also welcomes comments, ideas, and feedback.]

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Municipal Health Insurance

Pat Brennan, Deputy County Executive, updated Council members on the shared service initiative that was begun last year. He pointed out that the three issues that received highest priority from elected officials and the public were highways, health insurance, and parks.

He then introduced George Brigati of KBM Consultants, an insurance consultant who manages a health care consortium of 15 school districts in Broome, Tioga, and Delaware Counties.

Mr. Brigati explained to the Council what he specializes in self-funded insurance plans. With self-insured plans, the organization pays premiums itself but pays an insurance company to administer the program.

Mr. Brigati explained that New York State law limits most municipalities from creating the ideal type of health insurance plan. However, a consortium with over 10,000 enrollees would allow the creation of any kind of plan desired. He said that 10,000 could easily be reached between the school district's 8,500 enrollees and the addition of the municipalities.

Mr. Brigati believes that the municipalities could probably save money by joining the school consortium because it would reduce the cost of administration and remove profit from the cost as well. Since most municipalities in Broome County use Blue Cross/Blue Shield it would be fairly easy to transition to the school district consortium which is also administered by Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

Council members then asked Mr. Brigati several questions in order to understand how joining the school district consortium would work. He explained that all of the participating municipalities would be self-funded and Blue Cross/Blue Shield would be the administrator.

Theodore Woodward asked what the premium rate would be because that is what municipal leaders really need to know. Mr. Brigati said that he would have to study it and that everyone's rate would be based on an average contract rate of the entire group plus an individual experience rate. He said that by joining together, large claims don't effect rates as much and it levels out costs over time.

Margaret Turna asked Mr. Brigati what he was looking for right now from the municipalities. He said that he needs to figure out who is interested in the idea of joining the school district consortium and then he needs to complete a feasibility study to determine what the rates would be.

Debbie said that everyone thought that they would come the meeting and find out how much savings there would be.

Mr. Brigati indicated that he would need more detailed information from municipalities.

Peter Andreasen asked if joining the consortium would be a one time opportunity. Mr. Brigati said no. A steering committee decides who can join the consortium and several school districts have joined over the years.

Pat said that the county is going to pursue the idea because it looks like it will save money. He said that joining a larger consortium would average out the costs from a catastrophic event, especially for smaller municipalities.

Kevin Burke said that a consortium would help stabilize rates. Mr. Brigati said that that is the case and it is why the Union-Endicott School District joined.

Debbie said that it seems that the County is going to pursue the idea of joining the school district consortium and that the municipalities can wait and see what the results are.

Other Business

Debbie announced that the League of Women Voters would be holding a forum on shared services on February 25th at the Vestal Public Library. Barbara Fiala, County Executive, and Elaine Jardine from the Tioga County Department of Economic Development and Planning will be speaking. Coffee is at 10 AM with the meeting starting at 10:30 AM.

Tim Whitesell asked Council members if their municipalities had acted on the elections resolution as requested by the Broome County Board of Elections. He suggested that municipalities should not pass the resolution until some questions are answered.

The Council discussed the issue and there was confusion about how the county will reimburse municipalities for storing voting machines.

Debbie said that the Council of Governments is a good forum for discussing elections concerns and that representatives from the Board of Elections would be invited to the next meeting in February.

Tim also wanted to inform Council members that the Onondaga nation is requiring archaeology studies prior to projects that occur on lands that they claim.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM

Recorded and edited by: Jeremy Evans

Approved by: Debra A. Preston