

BIG THREE GROUP MEETING SUMMARY NOTES
Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)
League of Minnesota Cities (LMC)
Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)

Thursday, June 14, 2007
9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

AMC:

Bob Fenwick, AMC President
Jim McDonough, AMC 2nd VP
Nancy Schouweiler, AMC Past President
Paul Wilson, AMC 1st VP
Jim Mulder, AMC Executive Dir.
Mary Kummer, AMC Staff
Laurie Klupacs, AMC Staff
Scott Simmons, AMC Staff

MSBA:

Rolf Parsons, MSBA Board
Bob Meeks, MSBA Executive Dir.
Grace Schwab, MSBA Staff

LMC:

Marvin Johnson, LMC President
Todd Prafke, LMC 1st VP
Mary Hamann-Roland, LMC 2nd VP
Jim Miller, LMC Executive Dir.
Kevin Frazell, LMC Staff
Mary-Margaret Zindren, LMC Staff
Sarah Dirksen, LMC Staff

The Association of Minnesota Counties chaired this meeting. Bob Fenwick called the meeting to order and welcomed the group.

JOINT LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE RECAP

Group agreed it was a good conference and will plan on a Joint Legislative Conference again in 2008. The three associations discussed dates and decided upon April 9, 10, 11 at the same location as 2007 conference, the Crowne Plaza St. Paul (previously Radisson Riverfront). All three associations did well financially. One challenge is how to schedule the last event to maintain attendance. Approx. 50-60 legislators attended the evening reception.

Recommendations/Ideas:

- Charge a two-tier pricing with one price for the evening reception and Conference/Capitol Day and another price for Conference/Capitol Day only. The pricing structure will be at the discretion of each association for their own members.
 - Create a map for the evening reception where sections of MN elected officials gather in certain parts of the room so legislators can find them easier.
 - Have the complete group together at the beginning of the day, then separate into associations, and then join together again for the lunch.
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The Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT) Executive Director expressed interest for MAT to be included in the next joint conference. The group discussed how that creates another level of complexity to the conference with a narrower band of issues that overlap and the financial aspect with potentially needing a larger facility in future years to accommodate the four associations. **Action: The four executive directors (AMC, LMC, MSBA, MAT) will meet to see how a joint conference with the four associations could work.**

ADDED AGENDA ITEM: SPECIAL SESSION OF LEGISLATURE DISCUSSION

Each association reported on a potential special session:

AMC, per members at recent district meetings, won't advocate for a special session; that could be potentially uncontrollable; one of AMC issues would be transportation.

MSBA said they notice that no one is ready to commit to special session; one of MSBA issues would be OPEB; posed the question whether they can get cooperation from all 3 areas (Senate, House and Governor's Office) with the negative feelings that were present at regular session end.

LMC will not advocate for a special session; they sent a letter identifying their issues.

Observations of the regular legislative session = members notice there's still quite a bit of discussion about the impact of this Legislative Session even now weeks after adjournment; pretty good session – successful if can maintain and not lose ground too much; surprised at transportation decision; not complimentary of the bill writing process this year.

ADDED DISCUSSION ITEM: EXTENSION OF MEDICAL INSURANCE TOPIC

Suggestion for a future meeting topic – study the impact on local governments regarding the extension of medical insurance to offspring up to 25-years-old. Noted points: Age of dependency goes to age 25; starts Jan. 1; State is exempt; youth does not need to be in school like in the previous provision. **Action: Jim Mulder will follow up and obtain the wording of that bill to share with the Big Three Group Members.**

PANDEMIC FLU

Special guest Pat Bloomgren from the Minnesota Department of Health shared where the Department is in the Pandemic Flu planning process and some of the next steps. Pat explained the Code Ready campaign, an effort to help improve public preparedness. She invited group to visit the website www.codeready.org to prepare our own families and staff. Pat urged the Big Three Group to encourage staff and members to take care of their families first.

Other suggestions and updates from Pat:

When creating a plan, organizations and communities must determine “essential” functions and staff i.e. sewer, garbage, medical, and keep a civil society i.e. police and fire. Need to implement safety procedures for those essential folks such as hold virtual meetings as much as possible and educate on health.

Pat is finding some sister organizations are looking at this differently. For example, State staff wearing masks thinking they are protecting their employees = masks are not an effective way of dealing with issues.

Organizations should prepare for folks coming to work sick and needing a place to put them until they go back home. The issue is managing the problem.

Pat briefed group on a collaboration of #60 individuals that is meeting to provide framework on making decisions for distribution of materials that will be scarce i.e. masks, ventilators, anti viral medicines, etc. Problem: cannot create a vaccine yet until the virus is mutated to the human-to-human virus; not there yet so no vaccine yet; when it happens pandemic flu is there. Dilemma – who makes the decision to take a scarce piece of equipment like a ventilator from one to another? It’s a life/death decision and the doctor is in charge by using the guidelines that this panel is helping to create.

Group discussed and shared disconnect that is occurring between state and local levels and in the geographical areas around the state; Concerns about the conversations, planning and holes in the planning that exist. Potential for chaos is high. Observation by a member – state leadership doesn’t support the state department that focuses on this pandemic flu with enough funding and resources.

When group asked the question “how do we do a better job as associations of communicating the needs and the holes that need to be filled?” Pat suggested that we develop a provocative message with a list of needs and take it to the Governor.

The role of the Big Three Group and the three associations can be to promote that the Pandemic Flu is a REAL issue; no one will swoop in and save us; encourage people to get together and try to solve as many angles as possible; know and rely on each other’s expertise in those conversations. Big problems are solved on a local level; need to stress that this is a big problem and have that said by someone who is respected so communities realize the importance of preparation; helps to have someone who has gone through a major disaster help with education too. Approaches: 1. scare them and 2. start the planning within each local group.

Games for Change are simulated games to be more technically and emotionally responsive; shared experience so good to practice. **Suggestion: Big Three Group do**

a series of these around the state, learn from that and identify where the holes are.

Political dilemma – the state needs to honestly say that Pandemic Flu is a local problem and that the state should focus on helping to rebuilding after not focus on elements during the emergency as much. Need to honestly say what the roles are with politics aside.

Pat suggests we “push up” and “push down” by preparing the employees and staff as well as approach the Governor’s office.

Suggestion: have this Pandemic Flu planning issue on the agenda every time the Big Three group meets. Talk about shared messages, simulations, bringing citizens into mix as resources, use Governor’s office once we know what we need.

CITIZEN’S LEAGUE PROPERTY TAX UNDERSTANDABILITY PROJECT

LMC is participating in this citizen-based project regarding understandability of property taxes and brought the idea to the Big Three Group to see if AMC and MSBA were interested in being involved.

Summary: As a part of its Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150), the Citizen’s League has adopted a specific goal of “How can we remove the mystery from how our taxes are used?” As part of the MAP 150 project, the Citizen’s League surveyed 800 Minnesota citizens early last fall about their perceptions of our state. One of the very top concerns cited by citizens was the issue of rising property taxes. While expressing a great deal of skepticism about government spending and services, 81% nonetheless said that they would feel better about the taxes they pay if it were clearer to them how the money is being spent. Based on these poll findings, the Citizen’s League adopted as one of its four MAP 150 goals, removing the mystery from how taxes are used. LMC staff felt that there might be a great collaborative opportunity in becoming involved with this project in terms of their own goals of increasing citizen understanding and perception of value of what cities do.

Stacy Becker, the Citizen’s League MAP 150 Coordinator, answered questions the group posed regarding the project. MAP 150 is a starting point to address the perceptions; trying to develop a broad grass roots level with a systemic change in keeping citizens educated about property taxes; not to try to reinvent and overhaul and reform property tax system. Trust is important; Citizen’s League focus helps because it’s not an elected official doing it. One outcome of this can be how we can communicate to the citizens to try to educate the community. Stacy invited each Big Three member to tell her what the potential pitfalls to this might be. **Action: AMC and MSBA will let Kevin Frazell, LMC, know if they want to officially become a co-sponsor of the project.**

BUSINESS PRACTICE COLLABORATION BETWEEN CITIES, COUNTIES AND SCHOOLS

Group discussed ways to share and collaborate with each other e.g. IT level staff, computers; some have started sharing human resource functions. One purpose of this Big Three Group is to encourage our members to collaborate. **Suggestion: Form a joint member task force with a specific charge of looking at a specific topic (start with a “low hanging fruit” one), its feasibility and how to collaborate with each other. The three Executive Directors will examine structure and purpose and come back to group with recommendations.**

FUTURE ISSUES

AMERICA’S PROMISE: Kevin Frazell, LMC, briefed the Big Three members on the status of America’s Promise, a group that presented to the Collaboration Working Group in February. Kevin and Sarah Dixon, Executive Director for Minnesota Alliance with Youth, have met to further explore specific options for building a partnership between local government and America’s Promise.

Two specific focus areas:

Coordinating resources – an emphasis on communication as a key step to increase community engagement and leverage resources among existing youth programs. The objective is to make new connections between those who operate youth programs and those who have an interest in youth programs.

Contributing resources – to improve connections among the Big Three & Collaboration Working Group members and the Minnesota Alliance With Youth’s network of youth programs and youth advocates, they assign a Promise Fellow for the specific purpose of building those connections. The objective is to have a person accountable to manage the communications and coordination of projects for youth initiatives that would involve the local government group members and other organizations within the Alliance network.

FUTURE OF COLLABORATION WORKING GROUP:

The group discussed what could be done with the other local government and state group, the Collaboration Working Group. There is a pressing need to meet regularly with the Governor’s Office. **Suggestion: the Presidents of the 4 associations (LMC, AMC, MSBA and MAT) meet with the Governor to determine if there is a commitment on his part. If there is a commitment then analyze how that group differs from the Big Three Group.**

NEXT MEETING – DATE AND TOPICS:

Minnesota State Auditor’s Office requests time on an agenda, approx. an hour, with the Big Three Group to discuss what needs to be changed to improve and do a better job.

Action: Jim Mulder will invite Rebecca Otto to the next Big Three Group meeting.

Pandemic Flu topic will be on the next meeting's agenda. Idea: have an organized facilitated exercise for 1-2 hours. Suggestion: independently explore options of simulations e.g. "Games for Change" to take regionally. **Action: Kevin Frazell will research simulation exercises.**

Next meeting date: The group tentatively blocked Thursday, Sept. 6 for the next Big Three Meeting date; **Mary Kummer, AMC, will confirm date and location via e-mail.** MSBA will chair the meeting.

Meeting adjourned.