

## Special Commission on County Governance

Good Evening, I am Fred O'Regan, CEO of IFAW, headquartered in Yarmouthport MA, and I serve as an officer on the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce board of directors. It is in the latter role that I address you tonight. Since our CEO, Wendy Northcross, is out of town attending a business conference, and our chairman of the board, Dorothy Savarese, is a member of your committee, I have been asked to share our comments with you this evening.

The Cape Cod Chamber is a private not-for-profit non-governmental organization, serving all of Barnstable County. As the leading voice for our business community, we are deeply interested in the form, fairness and effectiveness of local government. We have enjoyed, since our founding, a strong working relationship with the towns in our region as well as regional, state and federal government entities to make our community a better place to work and live.

The Cape Cod Chamber has some similarities with the county, in that we are both regional in nature. Our program of work takes into account the 15 distinct towns on Cape Cod and, in recent years, includes working more closely with the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and Plymouth County. We know from our work that there are efficiencies to be achieved by implementing programs on a regional level, whether it is marketing to visitors from Boston, New York, London and Frankfurt, to helping small business owners with financial resources and business information. As a regional entity, we have been able to attract significant grants, sponsorships and volunteer resources because we serve a larger population of businesses and residents and have an efficient delivery system.

In our deliberations to date on the issues of any county-level restructuring, we have focused first and foremost on the need to specifically define the regional issues that must be addressed. In essence, we seek structure following function.

No matter the final form of our regional County government, we desire that it be efficient, effective and transparent for our community.

**Efficient.** In the current economic crisis that each of our towns are facing, where dwindling budgets and trickling revenue streams are the norm, we need a strong regional government to find economies of scale and efficiencies of process, to lead guide towns in thoughtful regionalization of their services.

**Effective.** The next 100 years promises to be as fluid and dynamic as the last 300 years has been. We need a regional government that is nimble and responsive, a government that can quickly digest regional issues, develop sound solutions, build consensus and act.

**Transparent.** Government should be a reflection of those governed. We need an efficient and effective regional government that is clear, unobstructed, understood, and accessible for both the residents and businesses of the region to voice concerns and solutions.

As we all know, the new economy will reward only those organizations – public or private – which are nimble, practical and transparent. Those entities weighted down with bloated fixed assets (including overstaffing) and duplicate layers of administration, simply will not survive. This principle should drive any dialogue on structure.

More specifically, the critical issues facing regional governance for the next century include:

- Public safety (fighting crime and drugs)
- Regional Transportation (local public transportation and accessibility to the Cape)
- Cost effective public services (thoughtful regionalizing of governmental services)
- Workforce development (to retain and attract jobs to the Cape)
- Environmental protection of our greatest asset our ocean, beaches and air
- Energy and natural resources (sound regional water management plan and development of workable alternative energy permitting process)
- Economic development (to retain and attract small and medium size businesses)
- Support the Cape as a world class regional tourism destination
- Electronic Infrastructure (broadband and wireless networks)

If we review this set of core issues, two things emerge: first, they are intimately inter-related. For example, business development, especially on Cape Cod, depends on a clean environment. And second, these issues can only adequately be addressed at the regional level.

We must face the reality that greater elasticity of municipal boundaries, in regard to addressing specific critical, regional issues, will be needed. In addition, greater collaboration between the public sector and the private sector, both for-profit and not-for-profit, is a must. The challenge is beyond the capacity of any one institution.

Thankfully, we do have some examples of public-private partnership involving the Chamber. Two good examples are the CEDs process and the ongoing SmarterCape initiative.

In closing, The Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce has drafted a new strategic plan for our organization. The draft version will be presented to the general membership at a meeting in early December. The following is an excerpt from the plan introduction:

“In our view, a regionalized approach to economic development and consensus building will allow Cape Cod to solve problems and build opportunity more efficiently. Today’s issues transcend the ability for any single entity to tackle alone and a regional approach can gain more resources in a limited-resource world.

We look forward to implementing this in partnership with all relevant organizations.

Answers to the questions specifically:

- How have you viewed your relationship with Barnstable County?

Excellent private –public relationship where we play an important role in gathering business community consensus on regional issues

- If Barnstable County were to restructure itself to be a more effective provider of regional services, what would you recommend that it consider?

Less bureaucracy ...to free the county to identify town by town cost savings by regionalization, where appropriate, without loss of quality of public services

- Do you have any particular needs that could be addressed in a restructuring of Barnstable County?

No, so long as it is structured so it can nimbly identify and act to address important issues quickly and effectively

- Would you ever see the mission of your agency being more effective within the structure of county government?

No, it's important that the business community, with our very specific interests, be seen as separate and distinct from public governance.

- If you are currently an organization within the County government, what vision do you hold for a newer, restructured County?