



REGIONALIZATION:

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Presented by: Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts

PROGRAM

Real examples of regionalized or shared services from communities across the Commonwealth. Examples will address:

- Why regionalize?
- What worked / didn't work?
- Process used (ie. IMA, regional agreement, special legislation, etc.)?
- Lessons learned?

PRESENTERS

Moderator: Shaun A. Suhoski, Athol Town Manager and STAM Chair

Example #1 (building; veterans): Leon Gaumond, Weston Town Manager

Example #2 (ambulance / dispatch): Jessica Sizer, Barre Town Administrator and
Nicole Parker, Hardwick Town Administrator

Example #3 (accounting services): Ryan McLane, Carlisle Town Administrator

REGIONALIZATION

THE HARDEST THING YOU WILL EVER TRY....

LEON A. GAUMOND JR. TOWN MANAGER, WESTON



WHY SHOULD WE TRY?

- Increased cost savings: The most recognizable benefit is the cost savings municipalities can achieve by regionalizing and sharing services.
- Greater access to basic, professionalized and specialty services: Example: By regionalizing library services you may see increased access to professional staff in specialized fields such as a children's librarian or reference librarian. Or maybe greater access for general library services if such services are limited in a small community.
- Municipalities can more easily meet their mandated responsibilities: Example: Regionalization is a great way for local boards of health meet the mandated responsibilities of performing critical duties related to the protection of public health, such as a coordinated, professional response to COVID

Report of the Regionalization Advisory Commission 4/2010

MY EXPERIENCES WITH REGIONALIZATION

In my 20 year career I have been part of dozens of regional efforts including:

- Shared Building Inspector
- Shared dispatching (4 separate studies no less!)
- Health services
- Some library services
- Some police functions (including mental health services for community outreach)
- Regional schools
- Veterans Services
- Housing Services
- Assessing Services

CHALLENGES TO REGIONALIZATION

- Are the municipal leaders/stakeholders strong supporters for the shared service?
(Note: this is the MOST important challenge to overcome).
- Human resource differences may make it hard: different benefits, collective bargaining, pay scales, etc.
- Costs to get into the game: feasibility study/analysis costs, upfront costs to start a program
- Micromanagement....

MICROMANAGEMENT... A (MINOR) SUCCESS STORY!

West Boylston/Sterling Shared Building Inspector

- Towns similar in size and need
- One Town had some extra capacity due to an economic downturn; one Town has significant need
- Completed as an intermunicipal agreement
- Great working relationship between the Town Administrators and agreeable Select Boards made it a success. Little to no micromanagement.



REGIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICES

IN THE TOWNS OF BARRE AND HARDWICK

THE CHALLENGE

Barre – previously had a non-profit rescue squad until the Town took it over to be managed by the Fire Department.

Hardwick – previously had a non-profit rescue squad. Instead of absorbing the service in a municipal department, decided to contract out.

- Providing ambulance services in communities where residents largely rely on Medicare and Medicaid is cost prohibitive due to low reimbursement rates.
- Contracting with a private ambulance company can be extremely expensive and unreliable.

DECIDING TO SHARE A PUBLIC SERVICE

Geography – Barre already provides primary ambulance service to the Town of New Braintree and mutual aid to Hardwick. The communities are in a central location relative to emergency rooms in the area.

Service – Pooling resources and expected call volume justifies more full time EMTs and Paramedics, paying them equitably to ensure longevity as well as improving response times and the quality of service received

MANAGING A SHARED AGREEMENT

Since 2021, Barre and Hardwick's regional ambulance service operate under an Intermunicipal Agreement.

Barre solely manages the service that Hardwick receives, meaning Hardwick has little control over how the ambulance service is managed. These types of agreements take a great deal of trust, so it is important to:

1. Enter into an agreement with good neighboring community/ies.
2. Advocate for your community's needs before signing the contract.

SHARED ACCOUNTING SERVICES

RYAN M. MCLANE

TOWN OF CARLISLE

REGIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Shared Building Inspection Services
- Shared Dispatching and Communications
- Contracted Health Services
- Regional School Districts
- Veterans Services Agreements
- Assessing Services – Contract and Shared Employees
- Accounting Services – Contract and Shared Employees



CHALLENGES TO REGIONALIZATION

- Communities can resist regionalization due to a lack of control
 - Local dispatchers know a community at a neighborhood level – even who is away on vacation
 - Police understand the local community and what local leaders want to enforce
 - Planners know a community's fabric and master plan
- Regional efforts can seem too remote
 - Some residents prefer in-person services
 - Employees want in-person interactions
 - Technological expertise varies from resident to resident
- Difference between desired cost and desired service level
 - Service demand does not match tax capacity

SHARED ACCOUNTING SERVICES HUBBARDSTON/TEMPLETON

- Costs for contracted services exceeded the town's need
 - Hubbardston needed to clean up and recreate procedures and policies
 - Contracted services work best when keeping the lights on
- Municipal accounting personnel and expertise is limited
 - When you have a good accountant (or finance employee), find a way to keep them
 - Sharing talent is better than losing talent
- Completed as an intermunicipal agreement
 - Had to be clear with employee expectations
 - Made town expectations clear early (hours, output, reporting)



SHARED ACCOUNTING SERVICES HUBBARDSTON/TEMPLETON

- A unique twist...
 - The shared accountant moved out of state, ending the IMA
 - The shared agreement built the capacity for remote services to work
 - Built a strong IT support structure
 - Trained employees to interact virtually with a remote accountant
 - Held weekly meetings to maintain one-on-one support and accountability
 - Marketed remote services regionally to support employee and town budget

CONTACT INFO

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