



Rethink county government

Metro-York will need to court cooperation from the incoming board of commissioners.

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Nov 27, 2007 — This is the fourth in a series of eight editorials focusing on the Metro-York proposal put forth by YorkCounts:

Recommendation 4:

Study ideas for modernizing York County's form of government: The current structure and scope of county government may not meet the needs of a modern, changing county. The Metro-York Municipal Workgroup posed several questions: Are three people enough to represent a county with more than 416,000 residents? Is county government as effective and accountable as it could be? Why have some of Pennsylvania's rapidly growing counties looked to change their form of county government, while others have not? While the Workgroup did not reach a consensus on exactly which form of government would be best for York County, participants agreed that it's time for a countywide task force to study the question seriously.

Our thoughts:

Is there a better, more effective way to organize county government?

Maybe - and the idea is certainly worth studying.

A "home rule" study commission could be created without a commitment to changing to that form of government - as Lancaster County is currently doing. In the end, the people decide through a referendum whether to change to home rule.

That's a fairly lengthy process, and Metro-York should begin it right now.

In the meantime, it's important for Metro-York leaders to court the incoming board of county commissioners if they hope to accomplish much over the next four years.

As the only existing truly regional government, the county's participation will be crucial to many local cooperative efforts. We can't create a county health department or a human relations commission - as YorkCounts has proposed - unless the county commissioners agree to do so.

Likewise, the commissioners' involvement would be helpful in any effort to create a regional metro police force. Local law enforcement intersects with the county at many junctures - the courts, the prison, juvenile detention, children and youth services.

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Commissioner Steve Chronister has proposed a sort or regional approach to crime fighting. How could his ideas mesh with Metro-York's ideas? It will be important to find common ground. We also wonder how his idea to create a county education chancellor might help coordinate some of the educational ideas put forth by Metro-York.

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top

All three commissioners-elect have expressed some concern about the proposal to rethink the form of county government - saying bigger is not necessarily better.

True, but Metro-York is right that it's worth looking at services and functions that might make more cost-effective sense at the county level.

Also, adding a few more members to the county's governing body - an idea Metro-York has floated - wouldn't necessarily expand the scope of county government or dramatically increase costs. It might just simply offer folks more representation.

If, in the future, we do regionalize more services at the county level, it would probably be wise to have a ruling body that's at least the size of a borough council or township board of commissioners - five to seven members.

ON THE WEB

Read the entire Metro-York proposal at <http://www.yorkcounts.org> . Read previous YDR editorials on the Metro-York plan at <http://www.ydr.com/opinion> .

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