

Regionalist Paper No. 9

Leadership Appointing or Electing Metropolitan Leaders What are the Issues?

As one gets deeper and deeper into the theories and process of regionalism, many first order questions arise needing answers such as why, how, what are the goals, how does one manage traditions and rivalries, and to what extent should you metropolitanize, if at all.

Those are not easy questions, and they are followed by a bevy of second order questions, sometimes called the third rail questions such as: Funding questions - How and who will pay for this level of regional management? (See Regionalist Paper # 10), and Leadership questions, discussed below - How, or by what process, will we obtain the necessary metropolitan leaders?

There are numerous combinations and possible answers to this latter question. In short, will these leaders be appointed or elected. As regionalism structures have been established in various metropolitan areas, each area has found its own unique way to acquire its leaders.

1. The methods of obtaining, and the arguments for having, Elected Leaders for a metropolitan entity whether it be a Regional Authority, a Regional Commission, a Regional Government, or any other regional position or body.

In short, such leaders may be elected publicly-at-large, or they may be elected publicly within, and as representatives of, designated districts or wards identified for this purpose.

Currently in Hampton Roads, none of the leaders of our various Regional Authorities (HRSD, HRT, HRPDC, SPSA, etc.) are directly elected to these posts. For the two-tier government structure in Portland, Oregon, the leadership of the Portland Metro Government consists of a three commissioners, including the President, who are publicly elected-at-large, and eight other commissioners who are publicly elected within, and to represent, their designated geographic districts. The leadership of the Nashville and Davidson County Metropolitan Government (one metropolitan council resulting from the merger of a city and a county government) are elected in the same fashion, as is the case for other metropolitan governance structures created in this manner. All cases of metropolitan government structures created by the processes of annexation, or consolidation of cities also have publicly elected leaders, mayors and council members.

In general, citizens in America like to elect their leaders. Foreigners find it surprising that in some locales, Americans elect judges, sheriffs, county clerks, clerks of the court, water treatment administrators (if the water turns bad, they can throw the bum out), and many more. If there are to be elected leaders for a metropolitan authority, commission, or government, one needs to decide whether these leaders are elected publicly-at-large, or by a process of geographic representation, or a combination of both.

In general, there are factors that do tend to bias things toward the preference of having elected leaders. The greater the organization's policy making authority, the greater its authority to expend funds, the greater its authority to raise funds, and/or the greater the level of historic animosities within the region itself, the more likely and the more prudent it would be to have elected leaders and also for some of these leaders to be the publicly elected-at-large type of leaders.

2. The methods of obtaining, and the arguments for having, Appointed Leaders for a metropolitan entity whether it be a Regional Authority, a Regional Commission, a Regional Government, or any other regional position or body.

In short, such metropolitan leaders may be appointed by the Governor, they may be appointed (one or more each) by the participating cities and counties that make up, or are to be serviced by, the metropolitan area in question. As an additional variable, the rules that are established for this may permit the appointment of citizens (community or business leaders) to these regional leadership positions, or they may require that participating cities appoint elected city council members as their representatives to these regional leadership positions, or they may require that the State provide one or more commissioners, any combination of the foregoing.

Currently, in Hampton Roads, all of the Commissioners or Board Members of our many existing Regional Authorities, Districts and Commissions are appointed leaders. It is noted that these agencies, in general, enjoy excellent reputations. Their leaders, however, are appointed in several different ways and with differing criteria in mind. The Governor appoints the eight board members for the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD, servicing 17 communities). The participating cities and counties appoint the eight board members for the Southeastern Public Service Authority (SPSA, servicing 8 communities). The Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (HRT) is a combination of the foregoing with additional State representatives serving as commissioners. The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC, servicing 16 communities) has both community-appointed and citizen leaders. In Twin Cities Metro (the metropolitan commission empowered with selected responsibilities for

Minneapolis, St. Paul and the local region) has a Board of Commissioners, all appointed by the Governor.

In short, these and each of the other regional organizations has a tailor-made leadership structure, hopefully the product of serious study. It does seem that in Hampton Roads, there is a disparate (patchwork, according to the Hahn Commission Report) and confusing character to our existing level of regional organizations. With no other regionalism moves, perhaps a reassessment and possible realignment of this aggregate structure would itself be a worthwhile endeavor.

Different criteria bear on the appointment of leaders. The regional organization, whatever it is, may be seeking technical expertise in its leaders, or seeking political or geographic representation in its leaders, or both. Patronage appointments are always a risk in any of these results. In some cases, after a few years, this has partially or wholly undone the original good that came from the creation of regional bodies. Another risk with appointments stems from the tendency over time for the entity to become narrowly functional and bureaucratic, increasingly divorced from its citizens and even from its participating city councils (so many were unaware of recent SPSA dialogue with North Carolina about a landfill project, just one example). Nonetheless, these are only routine concerns to be recognized in advance, for there are clearly satisfactory leadership constructs that can be developed for enhanced regional management.

The case of appointing elected city council members as commissioners on the board of a Regional Commission is a special case that merits further discussion. Some hold the notion that when a Board of Commissioners is composed of one city council member from each of the participating cities (as is the case for the Northern Virginia Planning District Commission) that this is an Elected Commission. Practitioners on the subject, however, note and caution that these commissioners are not directly elected to these regional governance positions, they are rather appointees (pejoratively, a type of carpetbagger). Oftentimes, being a city council member is a part-time job. An additional representational duty assignment to other councils or boards then becomes a part-time of a part-time job. In any case, their allegiance is, and most likely their real skills apply, to their real elected job, that of being a city council member. Appointing elected city council members as advisors to regional organizations is always beneficial; appointing them as functionally responsible board members may or may not work out. This sort of arrangement is used often in the military where the term liaison officer is used. Large commands (not unlike an organization with a regional scope) may have five and even ten or more liaison officers (LNO's) from other commands, bureaus, or countries. These

liaison officers are advisors, not leaders. In this paper, we are talking about leaders, be they elected or appointed.

In general, there are factors that do tend to bias things toward the preference of having appointed leaders. The more strictly functional or technical the mission of the organization is, the more its funding stems from service fees and the less it depends upon tax dollars, and the less social or political is its mission, the more likely and the more prudent it would be to have appointed leaders and that these leaders be subject matter experts as well as natural leaders, rather than patronage or part-timer appointments.

3. **Elected versus Appointed Leaders, concluding notes:**

a) **Legitimacy.** This is a key concept. In the long run, legitimate leadership, serving at public pleasure via re-election or not, is a structure that best serves and adjusts to realities on the ground such as growing populations and all else so impacted. Where public policy is made, or where spending authorities are high, legitimacy is especially needed. Where there may be the creation of an umbrella metropolitan agency to harness and coordinate the activities of a collection of now-existing but narrow and perhaps disparate, metropolitan agencies, here too, because of breadth of scope, the legitimacy of directly elected leaders may be warranted.

b) **Top Down or Bottom Up regionalist creations.** Louisville, Kentucky and Portland, Oregon are two of many examples of regions where metropolitan governance structures were created with great public awareness and impetus. With the presence of this bottom up approach, they created structures with elected officials. On the other hand, when regional governance structures are created rapidly in response to natural or grave economic troubles, structures are created by existing community leaders, a top down approach, that tend to have appointed leaders.

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