

# Task force to look at Cape Cod Commission

Outside review  
would last six  
months

---

By David Curran  
dcurran@barnstablepatriot.com

---

The Board of County Commissioners has decided it's time for a group of outsiders to take a look at the Cape Cod Commission.

The county commissioners voted unanimously Wednesday to create a "Cape Cod Commission 21<sup>st</sup> Century Task Force" to assess the regional planning and land use agency's effectiveness and recommend ways to improve it.

"I think it's a good idea and I welcome it," Margo Fenn, executive director of the agency, said, adding that an external review will

provide a good opportunity for the commission to hear from both supporters and critics, and to see "how we might want to refocus things to become more productive."

The commissioners named their chairman, Bill Doherty of Harwich; Assembly of Delegates Speaker

---

CONTINUED ON PAGE A:5

PATRIOT 2/10/06

# Task force to look at

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A:1

Tom Bernardo of Chatham; state Sen. Rob O'Leary, who helped draft the law that created the agency 16 years ago; and Elliott Carr, a member of the Cape Cod Business Roundtable who chaired a similar 1994-95 review committee, to serve as a selection committee. They're charged with assembling a list of 20 potential task force members, of which the commissioners will select 15 to serve on the task force.

The task force will have six months to complete its work - to make recommendations on how the commission can "effectively address" its planning, regulatory and technical assistance charges, and how the commission and towns can better implement Local Comprehensive Plans and reconcile differences between regional and local interests. The commission will then have six months to report back to the county commissioners on progress on the recommendations.

Doherty said the selection committee would have to meet before he could say how quickly it would come up with its list of nominees, but said he was thinking in terms of "a couple of weeks." He said he was encouraged that seven or eight people already had expressed interest in serving on the task force.

"It looks like this is something that has caught some of the public's imagination," Doherty said. "It might have legs."

Both Carr and O'Leary had agreed to serve on the selection committee before the commission voted, and expressed support for the idea of an external review.

O'Leary said it will be useful to look at the way the commission functions,

how it does business, and whether its mission needs to be refocused.

"Every once in a while it's a healthy thing to do, painful as it might be," he said.

Carr said he believes it has been "obvious for several years" that the commission is a lightning rod.

"Personally I think it is time to take a step back and take another look at what we might change," he said.

But Bernardo, while reserving judgment on the potential value of the task force, was sharply critical of the process, and particularly the speed, with which the commissioners advanced it. He also expressed doubts it will be apolitical, citing the composition of the selection committee - Carr and Doherty are members of the Business Roundtable, and Doherty, Bernardo and O'Leary will be campaigning for political office this year. O'Leary and Doherty are running for re-election, while Bernardo plans a formal announcement within 30 days that he will mount a challenge for Doherty's seat.

Bernardo said he first learned of the plan when Doherty and his fellow commissioners presented it to the Assembly last week, by which time Carr and O'Leary already were on board. After a long discussion that he characterized as short on substance, he asked for more information before deciding whether to serve on the selection committee. He said he expected to hear back from the commissioners next week.

When he learned Wednesday afternoon the commissioners had named him to the committee, Bernardo said, "I was blown away, not because they don't have the right to do it but because we were going to continue the

discussion."

He said he will ask the Assembly delegates to tell him whether to participate in the nominating process.

Most of Bernardo's questions - the task force's goals mission and time frame - are addressed in the document the commissioners adopted, but he was not in position to comment because he had not seen it.

One of his questions was not addressed, though: how the task force's work will fit with other ongoing examinations of the commission, one by the Assembly's Charter Review Committee and the other the commission's own every-five-years review of its Regional Policy Plan.

To Doherty, the answer to that is self-evident: both of those reviews are the work of the county government itself, and their purposes are different. The task force is to be made up of people outside the county government. That, he said, is the point. An external review will have a different perspective than internal ones.

The task force is to be made up of "persons representing varying interests including but not limited to regional representation business interests, environmental interests and other areas pertaining to the activities of the commission.

Business interests, along with some town officials, notably Hank Farnham, the new president of the Barnstable Town Council, have often been among the commission's most strident critics, excoriating it as obstructing healthy development.

Environmentalists generally are among the most ardent supporters of the commission's mission, though they often have been disappointed by the development that has taken place.

PATRIOT

2/10/06