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## Regionalism v. localism, topic of OCCF debate

SUGAR LOAF – Regionalism v. Localism – a debate at the Orange County Citizens Foundation Thursday night with speakers Dr. Gerald Benjamin of SUNY New Paltz and Wendell Cox, principal of St. Louis international public policy consulting firm Demographia.

A localism proponent for the event, Cox said the reason localism is more desirable is simply due to cost savings. He maintains that the regional approach usually involves consolidation of jurisdictions and their governments which has yet to be proven to be cost effective.

“Now academic studies routinely basically suggest that government consolidations save money,” said Cox. “Yet, I can tell you that of all the major consolidations that have occurred in the United States, not one single academic report has shown that any significant cost savings occurred.”

Cox based his argument on studies he has done in Indianapolis, Ohio, New York and Toronto. His conclusion is: when jurisdictions and governments consolidate, labor costs go up. He said that in New York specifically, tax rates are a major inhibitor of competitiveness.

On the side of regionalism, Benjamin said that is superior if used prudently. Rather than use entire jurisdictions being consolidated as his examples, Benjamin suggested that regionalism is just the acknowledgement that “some things need to be scaled up and some things need to be scaled down.”

He said there is sometimes a fear of a loss of community or control with regionalism; however, constituents believing that having the next highest, or higher, governing body controlling an aspect of their local affairs will create a lack of community is unnecessary since many small hamlets and villages have gone without their own local governments.

“We think that we have to defend every aspect of our municipal structure because we identify it with the idea of community,” said Benjamin. “But, if we separate the two, we can understand that we don’t have to have every municipal structure and still have community and we know that because we have lots of hamlets that don’t have municipal government and have community.”

County Legislature Shannon Wong, who attended the event, said that Orange County’s Legislature has opened a dialogue about regionalism in the form of consolidating municipal departments. Wong said at the next legislative session there will be discussion on consolidating IT and General Services; saying that, “The county is always looking for ways to save taxpayer dollars.”



Cox contends consolidations don't save money

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