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From Bridges To Bivalves, SAGE

By [Jon Lentz](#)

One proposal would consolidate New York's Department of Transportation, the Thruway Authority and the Bridge Authority under a single, centralized leadership structure.

Another would create a new department for all statewide back-office functions, from information technology to human resources.

But a favorite of Michael Balboni, who serves on the Spending and Government Efficiency Commission, is getting rid of a special commission on clams and quahogs.

"The question is whether or not we should have a formalized group looking at this particular set of shellfish, or whether we should not be shellfish and move it to another department," Balboni quipped at a recent SAGE Commission meeting.

All those proposals and many more will be on the table when Balboni and the other commission members vote on initial streamlining ideas for the hundreds of agencies, commissions and authorities that have proliferated across New York.

The vote is expected today, several members said, after which recommendations will go to the Legislature for an up-or-down vote.

During its last meeting May 19, the commission provided an early glimpse of what might be on the table for consolidation or elimination and what might not.

One potential candidate, the Office for the Aging, is likely to be spared from consolidation with the state Department of Health, said Paul Francis, Cuomo's director of agency redesign and efficiency and a commission co-chair.

"We really came away with a really strong feeling that putting them together would be far more likely today to bring the bad practices of DOH over to the Office of the Aging than bring the good practices of Office of the Aging over to DOH," Francis said.

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the Office of Children and Family Services, once a single agency, were also considered for a merger. But the two are likely to stay apart, given OCFS's focus on welfare and treatment in the criminal justice system and OTDA's information management emphasis.

The Bridge Authority and the Thruway Authority could be "functionally consolidated" with the Department of Transportation, which would maintain the bond financing of the two authorities while consolidating their leadership and improving coordination.

Following the model of the state's Homes and Community Renewal, which oversees five housing agencies and authorities, a commissioner and a senior management team would oversee the three transportation-oriented entities.

The Canal Corporation, which maintains the Erie Canal, could also be moved from the Thruway Authority, though its fate may be decided by a new regional economic council, another key Cuomo initiative. Economic development was left out of the SAGE Commission's discussions for the same reason.

"I think we're going to learn about all the different agencies and entities that touch on economic development, including the canal corporation, and the administration will be able to develop a better point of view how to really maximize a lot of these assets," Francis said, referring to the regional councils.

But the majority of more than 1,000 state agencies and authorities will be outside the scope of the SAGE Commission. About 600 are authority subsidiaries, financing vehicles or local IDAs, which were not created by state law.

In other cases, politics is a roadblock to elimination or consolidation. One example is the Belleayre Mountain ski center, which is run by the Department of Environmental Conservation and loses more than \$4 million a year.

The commission wants to shift the ski center, a key economic engine in the Catskills, to the Olympic Regional Development Authority, which thinks it can slash its losses at least in half.