

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION  
OF WANTAGE TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH OPEN FORUM, HELD AT  
HIGH POINT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ON OCTOBER 8, 2008**

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CALL TO ORDER

Commission Chairman Earl Snook called the meeting to order at 7 PM, and requested Secretary Lee Abbott to call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the Commission were present:

E. Snook, S. Lagattuta, P. Flynn, S. Hosking, G. Kresge, C. McKay, E. Meyer, A. Jacobs, A. Little, W. Dunn.

Also present: Jack Doyle, NJ Department of Community Affairs. Consultant Reagan Burkholder, Government Management Advisors (GMA), arrived shortly thereafter.

Mr. Snook stated, "This meeting is being held in compliance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, Public Laws 1975, Chapter 231. It has been properly noticed and posted to the public, and certified by the Secretary."

Mr. Snook led the assembly in the Salute to the Flag.

Commissioners introduced themselves. Mr. Snook introduced Mr. Doyle.

Mr. Snook gave a brief history of the Commission, including the application for and approval of a grant from the state of \$46,000 to cover the Study Commission costs. In response to a question, Mr. Snook clarified that neither municipality is funding the study. The grant requested was based on a budget developed by the Commission. Mr. Doyle added that the Commission could apply for additional funds if the grant is not sufficient, and the request would be judged on its own merit. The state requires fiscal analysis; it is the Commission's goal to consider other issues as well. It is essential that the Commission and the consultants receive comments and concerns from the community.

REPORTS

PR Committee:- Mr. McKay, who served on this subcommittee along with Commissioners Dunn, Hosking and Lagattuta, thanked everyone for coming. He briefly reviewed the efforts to inform the public of this open meeting.

Computer Blog - Mr. Lagattuta intended to demonstrate the blog that has been established as another venue for comments, but internet access was not available. The site, [www.swcsc.blogspot.com](http://www.swcsc.blogspot.com), was printed on the meeting flyer. Instructions are on the blog for posting comments and opinions.

Commissioners' Concerns / Issues: Mr. Snook described how the GMA consultants had worked with the Commissioners to develop and prioritize a list of concerns. He introduced

Mr. Burkholder, who reviewed the results of this process. Commissioners had been asked to take two approaches, 1) concerns and apprehensions of people in the two municipalities (what's on their minds), and 2) the most critical issues. Results were as follows. The Commissioners were then asked to prioritize the concerns and issues.

1. Concerns & apprehensions
  - Sussex Borough utilities
  - Financial issues
  - Police services
  - Autonomy and identity
  - Form of government
  - Sussex representation
  - Low income housing
  
2. Critical issues
  - Finance
  - Sussex utilities
  - Form of government
  - Communication
  - Evaluation of the two master plans
  - Transition
  - Identity

Mr. Burkholder commended the commissioners on the work that went into this list.

Purpose of the Open Forum: Mr. Snook reiterated that the purpose of the meeting was to get input from the public for the commissioners and the consultants to guide future deliberations.

## OPEN PUBLIC FORUM

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. Jacobs and unanimously carried to open the meeting to the public.

Mr. Burkholder served as facilitator, taking comments from the public. The comments were summarized and projected as follows:

- Act as leaders, not town criers – look to the future; base decisions on the long view (50 yrs)
- Reassessments – risk of values being higher than market values; buying and selling homes
- Combining services to save money (road departments, fire departments, police—in future)
- Transition – if consolidation is the decision, there has to be a vision of where we want to go -- what would a perfect world look like
- Patience – don't know the answer yet; regardless the county will be supportive

- Possible form of government – choose the most representative form (voters' choice) – equal representation
- Sussex water supply – will more people strain the system
- Public referendum – public hearings – and / or open forum
- Re-evaluations – differences between the two municipalities
- Sussex Borough water / sewer debt – state assistance
- If neither municipality didn't want to put up money, why do it? - reduction in state aid, looking for savings (consolidation or shared services)
- Tax bill cost of police department?
- Concern about larger government, leadership and corruption
- Sussex is no-growth area, Wantage is growing; new growth will strain services (water, school); impact on tax burden\*
- Learn from other communities that have consolidated
- Differences in properties in the two communities and looking at school taxes, reduction / increases between the two.
- Different tax rates between properties in the two municipalities
- Would a police department be mandatory if they consolidate (up to the governing bodies)
- If the representation of a consolidated municipality is just by population, Sussex loses out
- What was the result of the 1973 study – recommended consolidation (copy on the Wantage website)
- Set up a water district and a sewer district
- Wisdom from Trenton
- Everybody knows everybody – not an urban area, yet; managing growth
- This is just a study – decision is up to the voters; governing bodies thought it should be studied
- Local job opportunities
- Sussex has Guardian Angels patrols

\*summary statement edited by questioner after meeting

Mr. Burkholder reviewed the Commission's prioritization of concerns and issues, asking for a

show of hands to affirm or change the prioritization. Representation and not getting lost in the larger community were important to Sussex residents. There were two sides to the utilities issues--not overloading the system, and not being forced to use it.

Mr. Snook reviewed the timeline - the Commission's report will be completed in May 2009; if recommended, consolidation issues will be on the November ballot for the voters to decide. Questions would include consolidation; community name and form of government.

When there were no more comments, it was moved by Ms. Flynn, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried to close the meeting to the public.

## COMMENTS

Marc Pfeiffer, Deputy Director of the Division of Local Government Services, spoke about the state's interest in consolidation. Three consolidation studies have been completed in the last 20 years, with one leading to consolidation. The state recently offered more flexibility, and Sussex / Wantage took advantage of this opportunity. He noted that a new law has been passed assuring that if a property owner's taxes go up as a result of consolidation, that owner will receive a tax credit for the difference for as long as the property is owned. Mr. Pfeiffer commended those in attendance for their input. He stated that Jack Doyle serves as the state's day-to-day representative.

Mr. Doyle described the study the DCA will be doing. It will provide snapshots of the communities today and after consolidation: tax rate, debt, and school funding. Since aid is based on the number of students and the schools are already consolidated, there will be little change in that area. He congratulated the Commissioners on working well together.

Mr. Snook introduced Terry West from the governor's office and thanked him for his support for the Open Forum.

Mr. Snook thanked those who came and expressed opinions. He recognized the following attendees for their service to their communities:

Kathy Little - Former Mayor of Sussex  
Alonzo Little - Former Mayor of Sussex  
Doug Ricker - Former Mayor of Wantage  
Bill DeBoer - Deputy Mayor of Wantage  
Hal Wirths - Sussex County Freeholder  
Phil Crabb - Sussex County Freeholder

Several Commissioners expressed appreciation for the interest and input from the public.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved, seconded and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Snook declared the meeting to be adjourned.

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Lee Abbott, Secretary