

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION
OF WANTAGE TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH,
HELD AT THE SUSSEX BOROUGH HALL ON DECEMBER 3, 2008**

Commission Chairman Earl Snook called the meeting to order at 7:00 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: G. Fehrenbach, consultant and J. Doyle, NJDCA liaison.

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

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."

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Hosking moved and Mr. Lagattuta seconded that the minutes of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission held on November 5, 2008 be approved as distributed. Mr. Doyle requested that on page 2 under Fiscal Aspects of Consolidation, the item on property taxes state, "Wantage would see a *modest* increase." The motion was amended and seconded and passed unanimously.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Snook stated that subcommittee reports will be a standing item on future agendas.

Administration - Mr. McKay reported that he and Ms. Hosking have prepared a report on salaries and positions, outlining the effects of consolidation. The report is ready for distribution. Because it includes personnel information, the option of an executive session was proposed.

Most of the next regular meeting will be devoted to an educational presentation on forms of government. Mr. Snook suggested that an additional meeting may be needed. Mr. McKay moved and Ms. Flynn seconded that a special executive session be scheduled for Wednesday, January 21, 2009. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting will be held at 7 PM at the Sussex Borough Hall. The reports will be distributed for review prior to the meeting.

Finance - to be covered later in the meeting.

Planning / Zoning - Mr. Jacobs and Ms. Flynn have not met as yet. They are trying to keep in touch with both municipalities' planning and zoning boards. It was noted that Wantage recently discussed future plans for the airport.

Public Safety - Mr. Kresge reported that Jim Doherty, Wantage Administrator, had offered to prepare the OPRA request to the State Police. Mr. Doherty indicated that Wantage considers the issue moot at this time. The consensus was that a request at this time would be too time-consuming to pursue.

Mr. Meyer and Mr. Kresge will meet with the EMS and Fire Departments in both Sussex and Wantage and bring a report to the February Commission meeting.

Public Works and Water / Sewer Utilities - to be covered later in the report. Mr. Little brought an article from the NJ Herald's 50 Years Ago column quoting an October 23, 1958 article about Sussex Borough's efforts to expand the reservoir. The secretary will copy the article for all the commissioners and include it in the records.

In addition to the Water / Sewer Utilities, this subcommittee will address public works issues, such as fuel purchase, supplies and vehicles.

Public Relations - nothing to report at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Final Work Plan - the final report had been distributed prior to the meeting. Mr. Fehrenbach reported that the changes requested at the last Commission meeting had been made. He emphasized the need to allow sufficient time for analysis and follow-up and still meet the deadline. Per the statute, if consolidation is being recommended, a charter study must be completed. Additional meetings will likely be necessary.

Regarding the additional meeting being planned for January, Mr. Fehrenbach advised the commissioners to weigh the need for an executive session versus the public trust and employee notification (known as Rice notice). The Commission has no authority regarding salaries, and the salaries to be discussed are a matter of public record.

Fiscal Aspects of Consolidation - Mr. Doyle addressed the questions raised at the last meeting.

- Green Acres - Wantage has an open space trust fund, and Sussex does not. Green Acres suggested that this would be an issue for a new consolidated government to address and, if desired, put to a vote. The money in the trust fund would continue to be set aside for open space.
- Small Cities Community Development Block Grants - this federal program benefits low and moderate income areas. From the census track, an "historic district" or similarly designated area within the consolidated community could continue to be eligible. The mix for matching funds might change, perhaps to 80 / 20 instead of 90 / 10.
- Consolidation would not restore COMPTRA funds to Sussex. Consolidation would neither increase nor decrease the aid.
- The consolidation fund would be for one-time costs related to the consolidation.
- The debt structure of the two communities is similar. If the communities consolidate, both communities would accept and pay the other's debt.

Commissioners should contact Mr. Doyle if there are any questions after more careful review.

Workload Study Report - this preliminary report showed the projected staffing of a consolidated community. The shared services already in place reduce the impact of consolidation, but a savings of four full time equivalents (FTEs) is projected, representing savings of 10-12 %. Mr. Fehrenbach noted that no effort was made to quantify the opportunity cost of reviewing and maintaining two separate governing organizations. Other efficiencies may result from “thinking as one;” again, these less tangible benefits are not included in this report. All cost projections in the report are based on the more expensive position or service between the two communities. Economies of scale can be lost through harmonization of wages. Wantage positions are Civil Service, Sussex positions are not. If consolidation is recommended, this must be on the ballot.

A new document, Profile of a Consolidated Community, was distributed shortly before the meeting. Mr. Fehrenbach noted that there are many choices for structuring the government of a consolidated community. The Profile breaks the organization into five service units (one support and four line services). This is not just a best-case scenario; the future governing body must be entrusted with many decisions. New Jersey’s Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) would make recommendations. The importance of a prudent, judicious, methodical governing body was stressed.

The Commissioners discussed the following questions / issues:

- Mr. McKay questioned FTE numbers; his subcommittee has access to the payroll positions, and the numbers didn’t seem to match. Mr. Fehrenbach will rework the FTE numbers to be sure there is an accurate match and report back at the January 21 meeting.
- If consolidation is approved, the new community government has several options, including hiring existing employees or broadening the search. Any buy-outs or incentives would be subject to review by the appropriate agencies.
- There are factors other than operating costs to consider, such as the impact of tax-exempt properties and planning based on the total community (less turf battles).

This report has not been accepted as final and is not yet available to the public.

Sussex Water / Sewer Utility Report - The following highlights were discussed:

- There is some Wantage participation in the utility (water more than sewer); there was discussion about Clove Hill Manor, and consensus was that it is considered one customer, not 117 customers.
- There is excess capacity or potential for excess capacity; Sussex has been taking action and significantly improving inflow and infiltration (I & I).
- The utility is at its peak of its debt service, but capital improvements are needed.
- There is potential to increase the size of Lake Rutherford by digging out the swampy area.
- Allowing more customers would reduce the cost to existing customers; careful planning can maximize the benefit to both communities and the utility.

Mr. Fehrenbach will provide the appendices to the report.

It was moved by Mr. Dunn, seconded by Mr. Lagattuta and unanimously carried that this report be accepted as final. The report will be available to the public.

NEW BUSINESS

Voucher approval - Ken Nelson, planner for Sussex Borough, submitted a bill for \$242 for preparation for and meeting with the consultant. Mr. Fehrenbach indicated that he had requested a meeting with Ms. Gleason, and she invited the planner to participate. It was anticipated that no new information would be provided to the consultant; that is, all information would be no different than what had been provided to the municipalities under their agreements with their planners. No other bills had been submitted for preparation of information for the consultant. Consensus was to hold off on approval of the voucher while the secretary and the chairman follow up with Mr. Nelson.

Next meeting - Mr. Snook reported that he has invited Dr. Ernest Reock, Professor Emeritus from Rutgers Center for Government Services to come to the January 7, 2009 Commission meeting for a presentation on forms of government. He will be the first and primary item on the agenda. The secretary will confirm with Dr. Reock and see if any special equipment is needed.

Consultant reports - Mr. Lagattuta expressed the commissioners' appreciation to Mr. Doyle and Mr. Fehrenbach for their thorough reports. Mr. Snook thanked them and the commissioners for their efforts.

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

Mr. Lagattuta moved to open the session to the public; Mr. McKay seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

Jim Doherty, Wantage resident and Township Administrator, suggested that the state reconsider restoration of Sussex aid if consolidation is approved. Mr. Snook indicated that he would contact Marc Pfeiffer, NJ Division of Local Government Services.

Mr. Doherty offered the following comments:

- Keep the envisioning process simple, maximizing savings and minimizing change.
- Offer scenarios, not answers; the new government, not the Commission, would have the control.
- Balance commitments to current employees and taxpayers.
- There are benefits as well as drawbacks to operating under Civil Service; advantages include clear-cut hiring, promotion and firing and the elimination of nepotism.

Kathy Little, Sussex resident and former mayor clarified that the Clove Hill Manor contract required that Clove Hill Manor provide a water tower; land was offered (donated), but the DEP and farmland preservation wouldn't allow the tower on that site. Another site met with complaints from a neighbor. Mr. Meyers noted negotiations continue.

With no other public comments to be offered, Ms. Hosking moved to close the meeting to the public and return to the regular order of business. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lagattuta and unanimously carried.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS

With no other items for consideration it was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. Lagattuta and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Snook declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Lee Abbott, Secretary