

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION OF WANTAGE
TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH SPECIAL MEETING
HELD AT THE WANTAGE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING
ON APRIL 22, 2009**

Commission Chairman Earl Snook called the meeting to order at 7:10 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, W. Dunn, S. Hosking, A. Little, C. McKay, E. Meyer. G. Kresge arrived at 7:35. Also present were J. Doyle, NJDCA and R. Burkholder, consultant. Commissioners Flynn and Jacobs were not present.

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

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. McKay and carried with no nays to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission of Wantage Township and Sussex Borough held on March 4, 2009; Mr. Meyer abstained. It was moved by Mr. Dunn, seconded by Ms. Hosking and carried with no nays to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission of Wantage Township and Sussex Borough held on April 1, 2009; Mr. Little abstained.

OLD BUSINESS

Sewer Service Areas

Mr. Snook asked Jim Doherty, Wantage Township Administrator, to review the status of the sewer service areas: Sussex is making serious headway in reducing inflow and infiltration and is looking to Wantage to use the found allocation to improve the local economy. The two municipalities collaborated on developing their wastewater management plans, which have been approved by the County. Several areas were eliminated from the plans by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, severely restricting future growth. Various officials from the two municipalities recently met together and agreed that this issue should be brought to the attention of the Consolidation Study Commission. Letters from both municipalities had been sent to Commission members prior to the meeting, suggesting that the Commission consider contacting the DCA for assistance in requesting a waiver or reconsideration from the DEP.

Consensus was that sewer and water allocations are integral to the consolidation discussion. Wantage has land, and Sussex will have sewer allocation; resulting planned growth would benefit the consolidated community. While it may not be possible to have a final decision from the DEP

in time for inclusion in the Commission's report, the report should include a summary of the situation. It was moved by Mr. Lagattuta, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried to send a letter to the DCA regarding the DEP and the wastewater treatment plan. Mr. Snook instructed the Utilities Subcommittee to carefully review municipalities' plan and the DEP's response, and to work with the secretary to prepare the letter to the DCA.

Mr. Little questioned if further attention should be given to the water; is there enough water available in Lake Rutherford for the Lake Neepaulin area and Route 23 corridor? Mayor Parrott clarified that the engineers have indicated that there is sufficient water, and that application could be made through the permit process.

Correspondence

Local Finance Board / Fire Department Funding - Mr. Snook briefly reviewed the response from the Division of Local Government Services stating that funding to the volunteer fire departments could continue at the current levels. Details are in the April 1 minutes, and the letters will be kept on file.

Local Government Affairs - Debt Reduction and Property Tax Relief - separate letters were sent to the Division of Local Government Services on these issues; they were answered in a single letter. The Secretary read the response.

1) The state had made no promises regarding debt reduction. There is an appropriation for FY 2009 and FY 2010 for "Consolidation Fund," which is intended to provide one-time financial assistance to municipalities considering consolidation. Some assistance may be forthcoming from that fund to facilitate consolidation. Mr. Snook noted that a list of consolidation expenses is being prepared and will be reviewed later in the meeting.

2) There has been no change in the status or law concerning the commitment to provide residential property tax relief. If consolidation is approved in November 2009, 2010 would be the base year of the calculation and funding would be needed for 2011 and beyond. The DCA would adjust the budgets to compensate for any consolidation-related or other one-time expenses that would skew the year-to-year comparison.

Mr. Lagattuta noted that funding is clearly available for one time transition costs; tax relief in perpetuity is less certain because the law could be changed.

Subcommittee Reports

Administration - Civil Service: Mr. Snook suggested reconsidering the recommendation for Civil Service. The Administration Subcommittee members had thought that since the larger municipality operates under Civil Service, recommending that the new community do likewise would simplify the transition. Mr. Burkholder noted that Civil Service complicates business decisions in an economic downturn. It was moved by Mr. Meyer and seconded by Mr. Kresge that the Commission take a neutral stance regarding Civil Service and let the new municipality decide. If consolidation is recommended, Civil Service will be a separate question on the ballot--

the voters will make the decision. Mr. Meyer amended his motion to state that the Commission take a neutral position regarding Civil Service and provide basic information (not opinion) in the final report to educate the voters. Mr. Kresge seconded the amended motion, and it was unanimously carried. The final report will include the consultants' report on Civil Service as an attachment.

Form of Government Summary: the issue of wards is still undecided.

Planning / Zoning - Use of Advisory Planning Districts: The report was not available, due to Ms. Flynn's illness. It was agreed that Mr. McKay, Mr. Kresge, and Mr. Meyer would look into the issue. Mr. Burkholder noted that Advisory Planning Districts are optional; a brief summary of how the municipalities are already working together may suffice.

Public Safety - Establishment of Service Districts: Nothing new to report.

Public Works & Water / Sewer Utilities - Transfer of Property / Assets: the report was distributed, and some corrections are needed. A revised report will be distributed.

Finance - Apportionment of Debt: The report was distributed prior to the meeting. The report covers two time periods:

1. From the time of a positive vote to election: if one community wanted to incur debt, the other community must also approve.
2. From election to installation of the new government: emergency debt only.

Regarding schools:

- No change in practice for the Sussex / Wantage consolidated school district.
- High Point Regional High School - would require a separate majority vote in each of the two communities.

Water / Sewer: paid through user fees.

Using slightly different methodology from the Fiscal Aspects of Consolidation report from the state, 2008 Net Valuation Taxable (NVT)

- Sussex: \$0.171 per one hundred NVT
- Wantage: \$0.047 per one hundred NVT
- Consolidated: \$0.050 per one hundred NVT

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. McKay and unanimously carried to accept as final the Debt Obligations and Bond Issues Report. The report will be made available to the public.

Transition Costs List

A draft of potential transition costs was distributed for review. The following changes / additions were suggested:

- Auditors fees - \$20,000 (it was noted that the potential cost savings of one audit instead of

- two was missed in calculated savings from consolidation)
- Training - increase to \$5000
 - Change the Retirement incentives element to Severance provisions (note: per the state, there is a \$15,000 limit per person)
 - Fire / Rescue Vehicles (to eliminate disparities--see the Fire and Rescue Services Report) - \$625,000

The possibility of a Chapter 101 revaluation instead of a full revaluation was discussed. A Chapter 101 would be a revaluation of Sussex to match the more recent Wantage revaluation. This would reduce the cost; however, it was agreed to include the cost of a full revaluation in the list. Revaluation was a concern identified by the public.

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to send the Potential Transition Costs as corrected to the DCA.

Fiscal Aspects of Consolidation

The revised report had been distributed previously. It was moved by Mr. McKay and seconded by Ms. Hosking that the revised report be accepted as distributed. Via roll call, the following Commissioners voted in favor of the motion: Mr. Snook, Mr. Lagattuta, Mr. Dunn, Ms. Hosking, Mr. Kresge, Mr. Little, Mr. McKay and Mr. Meyers. There were no nays and no abstentions.

Form of Final Report

Mr. Lagattuta reviewed the draft he had prepared. He expressed appreciation to the consultants for their assistance with the format. He stated that he had inserted information in each section so the other Commissioners could see how the report would look, but that all items were open to discussion. Each section was reviewed and discussed.

Mr. Snook thanked Mr. Lagattuta for his work and noted that if consolidation is recommended, the report will be completed and finalized. Suggestions and revisions will be incorporated and a revised draft will be distributed prior to the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Voucher

Mr. Snook presented a voucher for \$14.85 from the *New Jersey Herald* for publishing the notice of the special meeting on April 22. It was moved by Mr. McKay, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried to approve payment.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 29. Several Commissioners will be unable to attend. It was moved by Mr. Meyer, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to reschedule the April 29 meeting.

The original deadline to submit the preliminary final report to the state is May 1, but Mr. Doyle indicated that an extension can be requested. Cancellation of the April 29 meeting means the May 1 deadline cannot be met. It was moved by Mr. Kresge, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried to request an extension to June 1. Mr. Snook directed the secretary to send a letter to the DCA requesting the extension.

It was moved by Mr. McKay, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to hold the next regular meeting on Wednesday, May 6 and a special meeting on Monday, May 18, both at 7 PM at the Sussex Borough Hall.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS

There were no additional comments.

O P E N P U B L I C S E S S I O N

It was moved by Mr. Lagattuta, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to open the session to the public.

William Gettler, Wantage resident, indicated that there would be transition costs for High Point school district and the state (for example, the municipality list on the tax forms). He also questioned the number of members required for a regional school district; he thought that it was nine. He noted that the state had made no commitment regarding debt reduction and that there would not be a Sussex revaluation prior to consolidation. He also provided a copy of the revised Fiscal Aspects of Consolidation report with comments.

With no further comments from the public, it was moved by Mr. Lagattuta, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to close the session to the public.

A D J O U R N M E N T

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

Mr. Snook declared this meeting to be adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Lee Abbott, Secretary