

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION OF WANTAGE
TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH SPECIAL MEETING
HELD AT THE SUSSEX BOROUGH HALL
ON MAY 18, 2009**

Commission Vice Chairman Sal Lagattuta called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM, explaining that Commission Chairman Earl Snook was ill. He requested Secretary Lee Abbott to call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the Commission were present:

Present: S. Lagattuta, W. Dunn, S. Hosking, A. Jacobs, G. Kresge, A. Little, C. McKay, E. Meyer. P. Flynn arrived at 7:20. Absent: E. Snook.

J. Doyle, NJDCA liaison, and R. Burkholder, consultant, were also present.

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

Mr. Lagattuta 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."

A member of the public, Bill Gettler, noted the attendance of Wantage Township Committee members. Jim Doherty, Wantage Township Administrator, stated that they were attending as interested citizens. Mr. Lagattuta stated that no Consolidation Study Commission guidelines were being obstructed, and the meeting continued.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Mr. McKay, seconded by Mr. Kresge and unanimously carried by voice vote to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission of Wantage Township and Sussex Borough held on May 6, 2009.

OLD BUSINESS

Sewer Service Areas

A meeting was held between Commission, Borough, and Township representatives and officials from the NJ Department of Community Affairs, Office of Smart Growth and Department of Environmental Protection, as well as a representative from the Governor's office, to discuss the limitations on future growth due to wastewater management restrictions. Mr. Meyer summarized the outcomes of the meeting, emphasizing the willingness of the DEP to reconsider the status of the sections currently trucking sewage to SCUMA and the offer of assistance from the Office of Smart Growth. Application for Plan Endorsement (town center designation) was suggested; it would be to the advantage of both communities to work together on this, with or without consolidation (Wantage has already started the process, and Sussex could catch up).

Mr. Lagattuta noted that the Consolidation study made it possible to gather together these critical players on short notice. He thanked Mr. Meyer, Mr. Snook and others for their efforts and expressed cautious optimism that the concerns can be satisfactorily resolved.

Subcommittee Reports

Administration - nothing to report.

Planning / Zoning - Mr. McKay distributed the report, which included suggestions that the following be considered:

- Business growth map for Route 23 South
- Charrett - a display of prospective town maps / possible building projects to be reviewed by and get input from the public
- 5-10 year plan

Mr. McKay reviewed the history of the two communities, noting that Wantage become a Township in 1754 and Deckertown (Sussex) became a separate municipality in 1902. Sussex has, in essence, been the town center for Wantage.

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried by roll call vote that this Planning and Zoning Subcommittee Report be accepted as final. It will be made available to the public. Appreciation was expressed for Mr. McKay's work on the report.

Public Safety - nothing to report.

Public Works & Water / Sewer Utilities - A previous version of the report had been circulated. Mr. Dunn reviewed the changes and read the conclusion and an addendum that outlined the concerns about sewer service areas and future growth. The report includes the following:

- View water / sewer as tools for shaping development, leveraged through a master plan
- Maintain as a separate utility, so it will not be a burden on Wantage residents
- Refer to the consultants' report, Overview of the Borough of Sussex Water and Sewer Utility, for more information.

It was moved by Ms. Flynn, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried by roll call vote that the Public Works & Water / Sewer Utilities Subcommittee report be accepted as final. The report will be made available to the public. Mr. Dunn was thanked for preparing the report.

Finance - nothing to report.

Form of Government - A summary of the form of government being recommended is needed for the final consolidation report. Ms. Hosking will provide this document.

Transition Costs list

Mr. Lagattuta and Mr. Dunn (filling in for Mr. Snook) met just prior to the Commission meeting with Mr. Pfeiffer and Mr. Doyle from the DCA regarding the list of possible transition costs.

While no definite decisions were made at that meeting, the discussion was summarized as follows:

- Organization and Staffing - likely to be approved as requested, except for severance which may be a possibility but is not assured.
- Financial - in question as revaluation will be determined by the coefficient of deviation for Sussex (must be greater than 15%); valuation and sale of assets would not be included.
- Identity and Communications - likely to be approved as requested.
- Legal and Planning - fees for real estate transfers, attorney review of ordinances / personnel policies, and codification would likely be approved as requested; development of administrative code reduced to \$5000; combining master plan with Plan Endorsement might be considered (perhaps \$200,000).
- Physical - capital expenditures will not be included; moving costs, transfer and integration of files would likely be approved as requested; a proposal would be needed for radio communications.
- Emergency Equipment - the state will consider \$300,000.
- No contingency costs would be included.

The estimate for covered transition costs is approximately \$650,000. A final determination will be made by August 1.

Mr. Lagattuta stated that debt service was discussed. If the money to be spent on tax credits to Wantage residents was put into debt reduction, there might be a tax savings for Wantage residents. Mr. Pfeiffer agreed to look into the possibility.

Form of Final Report

A new version was e-mailed to Commissioners prior to the meeting. Changes from the previous version were reviewed. There were no objections to any of the changes.

A letter signed by the Commission Chairman will be included with the final report. The Commission is required to report on or before June 1. If the Commission votes in favor of consolidation, there will be a second vote after the final transition costs are determined--in approximately 60 days. If the vote is not unanimous, a minority report must be included in the final report.

NEW BUSINESS

Vote

Each commissioner was given the opportunity to comment:

- Mr. McKay's concern was that he was not elected by the public, but selected by elected representatives. He stated that the public should have the opportunity to decide via their votes.
- Mr. Little stated that the facts and figures are worthwhile to put before the public. Sussex has little opportunity for additional ratables without Wantage.

- Mr. Dunn stated that he was looking for “red flags” or disqualifiers and found none. The public should look for value beyond the next tax bill, give the decision due diligence and decide if there is merit.
- Mr. Meyer considered the study as similar to being on a grand jury—to look at all the information and decide if it makes sense for both communities. Separately, both communities can survive; the issue is what can be accomplished together.
- Ms. Flynn expressed hope that people would take advantage of the information available on the websites and study to make an informed decision.
- Ms. Hosking said that the public should make the final decision.
- Mr. Jacobs stated that he was entrusted to look into what is best for Wantage.
- Mr. Kresge noted that “thinking as one” is a monumental task. The Commission could be a catalyst for a new government.
- Mr. Lagattuta stated that the Commission is a microcosm of the communities. He acknowledged Mr. Snook’s expertise in leading the Commission.

It was moved by Mr. Little and seconded by Mr. Kresge that the Commission recommend consolidation of the Township of Wantage and the Borough of Sussex. After discussion, it was moved by Ms. Hosking and seconded by Mr. McKay that the vote be taken. By roll call:

In favor of consolidation:

Mr. Dunn (Wantage)
 Ms. Flynn (Sussex)
 Ms. Hosking (Wantage)
 Mr. Kresge (Wantage)
 Mr. Lagattuta (Sussex)
 Mr. Little (Sussex)
 Mr. McKay (Sussex)
 Mr. Meyer (Sussex)

Opposed:

Mr. Jacobs (Wantage)

Absent:

Mr. Snook (Wantage)

The vote carried, with a majority of both municipalities voting in favor of consolidation.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS

The Commissioners thanked the consultants, Mr. Fehrenbach and Mr. Burkholder, Mr. Doyle, DCA liaison, and Mr. Doherty, Wantage Township Administrator, for their consistent support.

Appreciation was expressed for the public turnout for the meeting.

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

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

George O'Dell, Wantage resident, questioned how money would be forthcoming from the state, which is bankrupt. He also asked about police services and was referred to the report on *Mandatory Payment for State Police Service in Rural Municipalities*, which is available to the public.

Bill Gettler, Wantage resident, stated his belief that consolidation will be financial disaster for taxpayers of Wantage.

With no further comments from the public, it was moved by Ms. Flynn, seconded by Ms. Hosking and unanimously carried to close the session to the public.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was scheduled for July 1 in Sussex, with a final meeting scheduled for August 5 in Wantage. It was agreed that the July 1 meeting is too soon and should be cancelled. The August 5 meeting is probably too late, considering the August 15 date to get the question on the ballot. Consensus was to hold the next meeting on Monday, August 3, 7 PM at the Sussex Borough Hall.

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

Mr. Lagattuta declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9: 10 PM.

Lee Abbott, Secretary