

## **Final Report from the Planning and Zoning Sub committee of the Sussex Wantage Consolidation Committee.**

This report, as requested by the commissioners of the Sussex Wantage Consolidation committee is an examination of possible uses of land within the confines of a newly consolidated township of the existing towns of Sussex and Wantage. As a subcommittee we have first related the history of these two towns, examined possible land usage now not available to each town separately, examined a wastewater management plan created by the Public Works and Water/Sewer Utilities sub committee (Appendix H) met with the state EPA, DCA and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Office of Smart Growth, discussed the ramifications of this new land usage with Township Engineers and identified the areas of possible “Mixed Use Building” in existing land particularly on the Route 23 corridor, south of Sussex Borough. By examining the history of these two towns, the planning involved in consolidation, creating a realistic 5-10 year plan and recommending a Charrett, this committee attempts to show where the future will bring these two towns.

### **History:**

New Jersey is a state with 566 municipalities. There are more municipalities per square mile than any other state in the nation. Pulitzer prize poet Steven Dunn has said, “New Jersey’s gift to its poets is that it’s a place of many places.” That being said it is also a place of redundancies. Considering the population of New Jersey is roughly one government runs the same as New York City’s and the city is telling. A commission in Trenton called the Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission has recommended twenty-six possible mergers in North Jersey communities and the South Jersey recommendations are expected later this month. Sussex Wantage is one of these recommendations.

This does not come out of the blue. Not only has there been a recommendation to consolidate before (1973) but also the shared services, most notably in Education, has long lent the two communities the sense of shared destiny. In fact the history of the two towns has always been symbiotic. Originally the land that is now Sussex Borough was part of Wantage. Wantage originally incorporated on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1754. “Deckertown (Sussex Borough) was a part of Wantage Township until October 14, 1891, when it separated and in 1902 became Sussex” (Lawrence King, Our Wantage Heritage, 1976). As a matter of fact, according to King, township meetings, until 1891, were held in various homes “both in the Township of Wantage and in Sussex, then Deckertown” (King 6). The actual octagon that informs Sussex’s boundaries were originally defined in an article in the Independent newspaper that stated, rather hilariously, that:

Beginning at a point due west, distant 2500' from an iron driven in Main Street, in the village of Deckertown, in front of Thomas Armstrong's stone storehouse, and 49.5' from the west corner thereof, and also 59.6' from the south corner of Emily C. Dickson's brick store building, and also 58.1' from the angle of the "Union Block", between the windows northeast of the door in the banking room of the Farmers National Bank, from said distant point (1) north twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (2) north twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (3) south twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (4) south twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (5) south twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (6) south twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (7) north twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links; (8) north twenty-two degrees and fifteen minutes east, twenty-eight chains and eighty links, marking an octagon containing 400 acres (**actually incorrect, 569.7 acres closer number**), the perimeter of which is two hundred and thirty chains and forty links, each corner designated in the said perimeter is two thousand five hundred feet distant from the said iron post in Main street in the village of Deckertown. (Independent 9 October 1891)

Simply put, an iron stake was driven into Main Street, somewhere in the middle between the four buildings on each of the corners of Main Street, and measuring out they carved a borough out of Wantage. Peter Decker was responsible for this outline of Deckertown and although he should have had all the rights wherein, people from the state "by quit claim and release, sold large tracts of land to those who had cash who claim their land and dispossessed those who had settled on it without claim. The settler didn't have title and was out. (Stickney 67) Whatever the case may be, most of the Victorian cottages built along Main Street, Bank Street and Walnut, Sycamore, Maple were built wither in 1891 or in the next ten years. The newspaper hat published these sales was originally called the Independent but on Jan. 12, 1894 becomes the Wantage Recorder.

With the creation of Sussex Borough (Deckertown) in 1902 the two townships histories begin. While other independent areas of Wantage such as Clove, Libertyville, Colesville, Beemerville (Plumbstock), Mt. Salem, Lewisburg, just to mention some, Sussex Borough became an incorporated town. They have remained in this state for the past 107 years. Considering Wantage became a township on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1754, Deckertown was a part of Wantage longer (137 years) than it has been independent. An interesting point to consider now that the two towns are considering consolidation. While history cannot be the reason for consolidation it can be an indicator of the original intent of those who settled the area. Sussex is a 1 square mile octagon in the middle of a township that is, according to King, 67.9 square miles.

## **Planning for the Sussex-Wantage Township**

Planning for the Sussex-Wantage Township circa. 2011 includes planning for land use for the new town. One of the essential elements in this discussion is the use of water and sewers in areas where the utilities also exist. What is also essential to this discussion is how this new landscape will offer benefits to the taxpayers of both communities. Essentially, according to Ken Nelson, Sussex Borough Engineer, Sussex has little available land/space (15%) for new homes or businesses therefore new ratables. Its growth is severely limited and therefore it will remain the priority of the town to keep the costs of its infrastructure as minimal as possible. While Wantage has land for development, this development is hampered by the lack of Wastewater management solutions. According to David Troast the Wantage Township engineer the real growth area in Wantage will be the Route 23 South of Sussex Borough from the area around the Quick Check to at least the area below the new town center. Indeed Wantage already has plans for mixed use building area that will connect the new road by the Quick check to the area around the Wantage center. If Wantage continues to be an independent town it would need to petition the state to designate this as its "Town Center." Sussex already is designated as a "significant center" on Wantage's plan with the state, according to Jim Doherty. Ken Nelson argues it is only natural that Sussex Borough continues to be Wantage's town center and therefore this area of Wantage that is newly created is in essence an extension of that town center. The new area would have sidewalks, a "walkable center" and if it is part of a new consolidated town it would be create a significant amount of ratables through denser housing alternatives and sewer and water customers. Indeed the amount of money that could be taken in from this new area, is to be in the millions. Considering that the main line runs under route 23 right past this proposed area, the inclusion of these sites seems natural, David Troast even argued that if the two town's don't consolidate "the state is going to force you to talk to each other anyway." The need to have two plans to the state for both towns is already pressing, by combining it would allow the two towns to merge the plans and give them time to prepare a realistic 5-10 year plan.

### **A realistic 5-10 year plan:**

In order for the two township's citizens to be informed voters they need to see a model of what the future holds for a consolidated town. Because land use cannot be predicted and because so much is riding on the waster water management, it is difficult to predict, but it is certain that building will continue in Wantage. The realistic development model then would set up zones of development for the new town. This unified master plan would then be submitted to the state, but it all depends on the NJDEP changing its position on the area of growth south of Sussex on Route 23. On Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Marc Pfeiffer of NJ Dept Community Affairs, Kate Meade, Alan Miller and Ben Spinelli from the Office of Smart Growth, Nick Angarone from the NJ Dept of Environmental Protection, and a representative from the Governor's office met with Jim Doherty, Ken Nelson and Ed Meyer. Mr. Doherty presented a plan that would allow for growth in hopes that consolidation would guarantee further advancement of the new town's growth model.

Marc Pfeiffer began the meeting with a general statement, making it clear that there was no jurisdiction available for any other state agency to pressure NJDEP into changing its position or abandoning its regulations. Mr. Pfeiffer stated that the pursuit of consolidating towns, in and of itself, cannot be used as a means by which to obtain approval for wastewater management plans and sewer service areas.

Mr. Doherty explained that Wantage and Sussex understands this, but are interested in a dialogue to see if options may be available that otherwise would not be given consideration because of the consolidation effort.

All representatives of the State agreed that this was indeed possible. Specific emphasis was made by Mr. Spinelli, and agreed with by the other State representatives present, that regardless of whether or not the actual consolidation of the two towns becomes an accomplished fact, the issue of future wastewater management should be a joint planning effort between Wantage and Sussex, and that such a joint planning effort will provide an opportunity to open up the door for consideration of additional sewer service areas.

Mr. Angarone from NJDEP indicated that the NJDEP would be willing to entertain individual applications on a project-by-project basis and review data and input provided to support any future application for inclusion in an approved sewer service area. Members of the Sussex and Wantage contingent indicated that such an application process can be both time consuming and extremely costly, and requires a willing developer to act as applicant for that process. Mr. Angarone acknowledged that as true, and indicated another process by which the towns can accomplish the goal of obtaining additional approved sewer service area is through the Plan endorsement process (commonly referred to as "Center Designation" process) through the Office of Smart Growth.

Mr. Spinelli and Mr. Miller indicated that while Wantage had started the process of Plan Endorsement on their own behalf, it would be a smart decision for both towns to consider having Sussex begin this process as well, under a joint Plan endorsement application between Wantage and Sussex. Mr. Spinelli pointed out that the proper planning of future wastewater management will require interaction between the two towns regardless of whether consolidation happens or not, and such a joint effort provides the window of opportunity each town is asking for, in terms of obtaining additional sewer service area.

Mr. Doherty asked for assurance that Wantage would not have to "go back to square one" in the Plan endorsement process since local tax dollars and planning effort have already been used in the Wantage process so far. Mr. Spinelli agreed that this would not happen - in effect, Sussex could "catch up" to Wantage in the planning process and the two towns could move forward from there. Mr. Doherty then asked for an assurance that, after making this effort, there would not develop a catch-22 situation in which Office of smart Growth would say "thanks for your efforts but we have to say no to additional sewer service area because it does not fit into NJDEP regulations". Mr. Spinelli and Mr. Angarone both assured all present that this would not happen. Assurance was provided that if the two towns followed the Plan Endorsement process of Office of Smart Growth, then additional sewer service areas could be approved.

In essence, the Plan Endorsement process represents an alternate route for approval of sewer service areas. Thus, the members from Wantage and Sussex left the meeting with a feeling of cautious optimism, at least to the extent that a door has been opened for us to take action, rather than to feel completely frustrated regarding our local planning efforts for wastewater management.

**This meeting goes to the heart of the consolidation effort. What Mr. Doherty and others are arguing for the concession from the state that if the two towns go through with this process that there will be allowances from the state agencies to make this a better town, for all constituents, with a comprehensive plan for 21<sup>st</sup> Century growth.**

### **The “Charrett”**

The final stage in the planning of the new town will come after ratification of the consolidation. Within weeks the governing bodies of Wantage Township and Sussex Borough should call a Charrett. A Charrett is set up by professional town planners and engineers who set up displays of prospective town maps and possible building projects which are then reviewed by the town’s citizenry. Everyone in both towns will be asked to attend at different times, with focus groups attempting to divine public opinion about the new town. Such things as names, projects, town centers, future growth would be explored. These are usually 2-4 day planning session. A professional planning company should run this Charrett with the assistance the planners and engineers from both Wantage and Sussex: Harold Pellow, David Troast, Ken Nelson and Mike Vreeland. This group of professionals will take the input from the community into consideration as they plan for the next five to ten years in the town’s growth. They will present maps, sketches, growth models and possible problems to members of the community. There should also, at this point, be market research done to reach all the citizenry to discuss not only development plan but also the priorities of the community. The cost of the Cherrett and also the market research must be covered by the transition fund. The cost is approximately \$150,000.

### **The New Town’s Center**

What will the new business zones or areas of Sussex-Wantage Township look like? Included in this report are maps of the areas in question. Simply put the octagon shape of Sussex will now be conjoined via Route 23 with the Wantage business area, which, if the wastewater issue is resolved, will create a second center, joined in the middle by the bridge over the old railroad tracks by the AP. Is it a perfect plan? Probably not, but just think how Sussex Borough began with a man and his metal stake in the middle of Main Street.