

## OFFICIAL ABSTRACT

BOROUGH OF SUSSEX AND TOWNSHIP OF WANTAGE  
JOINT MUNICIPAL CONSOLIDATION  
STUDY COMMISSION REPORT  
1 JUNE 2009  
AND ADDENDUM

The Commission issues this abstract of the Commission's Final Report in accordance with the requirements of New Jersey statutes governing the consolidation process [N.J.S.A. 40:43-66.56(b)]

The Joint Municipal Consolidation Commission makes the following primary recommendations:

1. The Borough of Sussex and the Township of Wantage should be consolidated into a single Township, to be called the "Township of Sussex-Wantage."
2. The newly consolidated municipality should be governed by the Council-Manager form of government under the "Optional Municipal Charter Law." There should be
  - a. A separately elected Mayor
  - b. Six (6) members of Township Council elected at large
  - c. Partisan elections with staggered terms - (both municipalities currently have partisan elections)
3. Civil Service should not be established in the newly consolidated municipality.

The Commission also makes the following additional recommendations, conditioned on approval of consolidation by the voters of both municipalities:

- The election of new municipal officers would occur in November 2010
- Installation of new government would occur 1 January 2011.
- All terms of office would be four years. The mayor and three members of the council elected in 2010 would serve for four years. The other three members of the council elected in 2010 would serve for two years. After the election of 2012, these three seats would also be for four years.
- All duplicated statutory and mandated offices in the existing municipalities would be abolished and replaced with similar offices in the consolidated municipality, as detailed in the "Report on Possible Benefits and Drawbacks to Consolidation: Staffing" that is included in the Commission's final report.
- Existing debt would become the responsibility of the consolidated municipality, because the relative existing debt burden in the two municipalities is nearly identical.
- If the vote for consolidation passes, any new indebtedness must be approved by both individual municipalities from the time of the referendum until the election of officials the following November. Between the November 2010 election and the installation of the new government, no indebtedness could be incurred except for emergency situations. All new school-related indebtedness would need the approval of both municipalities during the period from the positive referendum to the installation of the newly elected officials.
- All real and personal property of the existing municipalities would be transferred to the consolidated municipality.

- The present Sussex-Wantage Regional School District would be changed to a unified Type II school district with members elected at large in accordance with statutory provisions.
- The present number of representatives from Sussex and Wantage on the High Point Regional School District would be combined and elected at-large from the newly consolidated municipality.
- All present ordinances in both municipalities that are found to be common in nature to both former municipalities would be combined into one ordinance that would serve the useful purposes of the newly combined municipality. All existing ordinances that serve the unique issues of the various sections of the two former municipalities would be preserved in the ordinance book of the newly consolidated municipality.
- The NJDEP should grant a waiver in the NJDEP wastewater plan to allow for development of undeveloped land within Sussex and along the south portion of Route 23 corridor in Wantage as was originally approved by the County of Sussex.
- A detailed examination and harmonization of the master plans of both municipalities should be effected by the new governing body.
- Special services provided in each community should be continued for a period of three (3) years following consolidation. At the end of the three (3) year period, the new governing body can then determine the propriety of continuance of these services.
- Regarding fire service and emergency medical services, areas of service and funding agreements should be continued as was previously done and previously approved by the New Jersey Local Finance Board.

The Department of Community Affairs has provided an offer of Consolidated Fund Assistance if the proposed consolidation of the Borough of Sussex and Township of Wantage is approved by the voters of both communities.” This offer includes:

- Implementation assistance of up to \$250,000 to cover the costs of approved expenses that would be incurred by the newly consolidated municipality to implement the new government. The State has provided a list of approved categories of expenditure.
- In addition the state has given the new consolidated community two options for additional funds:
  - The original option (N.J.S.A. 40A:65-28b) is that any property tax increase incurred in the first year of consolidation would be rebated by the state to a single family homeowner for as long as the homeowner owns the property.
  - A second option is that the state will give the new community \$500,000 to use as it wishes if the first year budget of the new community shows no increase in the property tax levy from the previous year.
  - Either option would take place if consolidation is approved.

The following summary is from two statements from the single Commission Member who dissented from the findings and recommendations of the Commission. Mr. Jacobs, in part, stated the following:

I voted NO because, except for a small handful of people in Wantage, this consolidation is 100% for the benefit of Sussex Borough residents. Wantage taxpayers ... get zero from this consolidation. I can't blame Sussex Borough residents for wanting to consolidate as they will receive many, many thousands of dollars in TAX decreases over the years. ...

The Commission has recommended:

- A referendum be held to submit to the registered voters of the participating municipalities the question of whether or not the participating municipalities shall be consolidated into a single new municipality pursuant to the plan of consolidation set forth in the report.
- Adoption of a plan or form of government identified in the Executive Summary of this study, namely the Council-Manager Plan.

USE OF ABSTRACT:

In accordance with N.J.S.A. 40:43-66.56 (b), the abstract shall be made available as follows:

- at the time the commission publishes and files its final report
- on a date not less than 30 days preceding the date fixed for the election, publish the abstract in the New Jersey Herald (prior to 2 October 2009) together with:
  - time, place and purpose of the election
  - a description of how one can obtain a copy of the full report
  - notification that, if approved by the voters, the consolidation plan will be binding and legally enforceable between the municipalities