

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION
OF WANTAGE TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH,
HELD AT THE SUSSEX BOROUGH HALL ON OCTOBER 1, 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 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."

Mr. Snook led the assembly in the Salute to the Flag and a moment of silence.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved, seconded and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission of Wantage Township and Sussex Borough held on September 3, 2008.

Posting the minutes: Mr. Snook noted that one municipality does and the other does not post the minutes when completed, without waiting for approval at the next meeting. No objections were raised to posting the minutes of this Commission as soon as completed in the municipal buildings and the library, and on the internet.

OLD BUSINESS

Open Community Forum: The tentative agenda for the special meeting at 7 PM on October 8 at High Point Regional High School had been e-mailed to Commission members. The updated agenda was distributed, and there were no further additions or changes. It had been suggested that the session be video-taped, and arrangements are being made to do so. Since this is a public meeting, formal approval is not necessary. The filming will be unobtrusive. A projector and microphones will be available; Mr. West has offered to provide the equipment. Introductory comments should be very brief. It was agreed that Mr. Burkholder would provide a 7-10 minute summary of concerns identified by the Commission and then, as a neutral party, facilitate the public discussion.

The Public Relations Subcommittee has overseen publicity for the open forum. An interview with Mr. Lagattuta will be aired on WSUS Sunday, October 5, at 7 AM.

Compensation for Mr. Doherty and Ms. Gleason has been suggested, as both provided excellent support when Commission was getting organized. Both have declined financial compensation. It was agreed address this again when the study is completed.

NEW BUSINESS

Financial Disclosure Statements must be completed within 30 days by all Commission members. Forms were distributed, but they can also be completed on-line; however, copies must be on file with both municipalities. Submit the forms to the secretary. Contact Mr. Doyle or one of the municipal administrators with any questions. Members with forms currently on file do not have to resubmit.

Fiscal Impact Study Outline: Mr. Doyle provided a preliminary outline to the Commission prior to the meeting. This outline includes the items that will be covered in the November report. The study is already underway, and the outline may be modified slightly. The focus will be finances and services. Sussex Water and Utility will be covered in depth. Commissioners may tour the water treatment facility if they wish.

Mr. Doyle reported that meetings have been held with Sussex County interim superintendent of schools and business administrator, Sussex / Wantage superintendent and business administrator and High Point Regional High School business administrator. Since the schools are already consolidated, there will be no cost savings there; however, tax rates are an issue. The study will provide pre-consolidation and post-consolidation information, with post-consolidation projections a guesstimate of equalized assessment. Mr. Snook and Mr. Lagattuta were included in the meetings.

Draft Work Plan: Mr. Fehrenbach distributed a tentative schedule / plan. It may need to be revised after the October 8 meeting. The deadlines mean "no later than" and were set by working back from the May 1 date for the final report. The Commission is responsible for the final report and must have the necessary background information well before then. The deadline for submission of the questions for the ballot is the 2nd or 3rd week of August. Commissioners can e-mail him with any questions, additions and changes.

The Performance Measurement Study is a growing group of New Jersey municipalities (9-14) that are interested in identifying ways to reduce costs and improve services. The consultants have met with Mr. Dougherty and plan to meet with Ms. Gleason soon.

The RFP called for a report on police services. A preliminary document had previously been shared with the public safety subcommittee and was distributed at the meeting. The report will be discussed in detail at the November meeting. There are a number of issues of concern to many municipalities, including lack of clear definition from the state and the inability to get data from the State Police. The Council on Local Mandates has been asked to address these concerns. The Freeholders have expressed no interest in expanding county Sheriff's services. The local perception is that State Police patrols have been decreasing and response time increasing. In general, a population of 15,000 is needed for a full-time police force, and Sussex / Wantage is not at that point as yet.

Wantage has a pending lawsuit that complicates the COAH impacts.

Mr. Fehrenbach emphasized that the Commission's job involves deciding what would and would not work; options can include less than complete consolidation; if consolidation is recommended, this commission becomes a charter study commission. Timing will be an issue for education and public input on type / form of government. It is essential to allow adequate time for review and analysis. Another subcommittee may be needed.

There was some confusion about the source of the May 1 deadline. Several commissioners thought it came from the state.

It was agreed that the information presented could be shared with the municipalities.

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

Ms. Hosking moved to open the session to the public; Ms. Flynn seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

Jim Doherty, a Wantage resident, stated that he called the police barracks for information and was told that he has to go through the channels. He is considering making an open public record request with the other municipalities -- not necessarily to win but to attract attention. Commissioners expressed support, and suggested that he approach Sussex Borough with his proposal. He affirmed that there had been no interest in providing services on the County level, and it may be necessary to do it locally.

He offered this clarification - the state has three months to review the report for statutory concerns. Ballot questions must be submitted to the county clerk by August 21. The May 1 deadline allows time for state's response, Commission review and revisions, if necessary. If more time is needed, the state could be asked to respond more quickly. It was noted by the commissioners that Mr. Doherty offered this background information as Township Administrator. Mr. Lagattuta stated that per the statute, the report was due within 10 months of the organization of the commission / appointment of the commissioners.

Terry West, Governor's Office, reviewed the publicity for the open public forum:

- Posted on Service Electric Cable's Community Calendar - channel 10
- Articles encouraging public participation will be published in the *New Jersey Herald* and the *Star-Ledger*
- The *Advertiser-North* has been contacted, but no response received
- Flyers have been distributed throughout the community and included in the Sussex tax bills (Wantage's bills had already been mailed)
- Information is posted on County, Borough and Township websites

Bill Gettler, Wantage resident, stated that analysis of combined schools had been done previously by a taxpayer's group and provided to Wantage Township. That analysis didn't include the impact of proposed large developments, which would be worthwhile. He also asked about Mayor

Parrott's comment at a general meeting organized by interested members of the community that the state had held out as a carrot a "seven figure number" - given the present economic crisis, is that offer off the table? Mr. Snook responded that no one knows.

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

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Snook expressed his hope that the public meeting would be well attended. He asked the commissioners to be at the high school shortly after 6:30.

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

Mr. Snook declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Lee Abbott, Secretary