

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE JOINT CONSOLIDATION STUDY
COMMISSION OF WANTAGE TOWNSHIP AND SUSSEX BOROUGH
HELD AT THE SUSSEX BOROUGH HALL
ON AUGUST 3, 2009**

Commission Chairman Earl Snook called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. He asked Secretary Lee Abbott to call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the Commission were present: E. Snook, W. Dunn, P. Flynn, S. Hosking, A. Jacobs, G. Kresge, C. McKay, E. Meyer. Absent: S. Lagattuta and A. Little. Also present were M. Pfeiffer and J. Doyle from the NJ Department of Community Affairs, and G. Fehrenbach and R. Burkholder, consultants.

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."

Mr. Snook reported that Mr. Little was unable to attend due to illness. Mr. Lagattuta was out of town but has been keeping in touch via telephone.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Mr. McKay 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 18, 2009.

BUSINESS

Vouchers

Mr. Snook distributed vouchers that were submitted for payment since the last meeting. Two from the *NJ Herald* for public notices regarding the May 18 and August 3 meetings (\$20.45 and \$16.45), have been paid. A voucher was from Mr. Lagattuta for \$24.75 for postage to mail out the final report has also been paid.

Ken Nelson submitted a voucher for \$660 for his preparation for and participation in the meeting with state official regarding the wastewater plan. Mr. Snook stated that Mr. Nelson's involvement had been very helpful. It was moved by Mr. Kresge, seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried to approve this voucher for payment.

Change Order

A change order from Government Management Advisors, LLC was previously distributed to the Commissioners via e-mail. It outlined the work performed by GMA beyond the requirements of the original RFP, specifically eight additional reports, plus assistance with the final report, and three additional meetings. According to the terms of the RFP, GMA could seek an additional

\$3900 for each additional report and \$575 for each additional meeting--\$35,825 in total. Instead, payment was requested only for the actual additional hours expended beyond the RFP estimate of 245 hours. Payment of \$5,750 for 46 hours was requested. Mr. Snook stated that he discussed this change with representatives from the NJDCA, who agreed that the cost was very reasonable and could be covered by the state; this was affirmed by Mr. Pfeiffer. It was moved by Mr. McKay, seconded by Ms. Flynn and unanimously carried by roll call vote to approve the Change Order. The secretary will notify Wantage Township of this approval.

Department of Community Affairs Response

Mr. Pfeiffer commended the Commissioners on the final report. The DCA's August 2 response had been distributed via e-mail. The State is offering implementation assistance of up to \$250,000 along with a separate incentive payment of \$500,000. The implementation assistance would be reimbursement for actual reasonable costs of the transition to the new consolidated community as outlined in state's response. Mr. Pfeiffer stated that the incentive is a new concept.

Costs for 2010, the pre-consolidation year, would be compared to 2011, the first consolidation year. Excluding one-time costs for both years, if the new municipality is able to reduce the tax levy to a level such that the average Wantage residential taxpayer does not see an increase in property taxes, the state will provide a one-time grant of \$500,000; it is anticipated that the grant would be used for capital improvements or debt reduction. The incentive grant would be in lieu of the annual tax credit for Wantage residents for a property tax increase resulting from consolidation.

Open Public Session

It was moved by Ms. Flynn and seconded by Mr. Dunn and unanimously carried by voice vote to open the session to the public for questions regarding the DCA response.

Bill Gettler, Wantage resident, commented on the following:

- The County equalization process does not include foreclosures and bank sales in the calculations. Without revaluation for Sussex, many improvements are not properly taxed
- The discrepancy between the amount of Commission's request and the state's response
- The Commission's elimination of some medical benefits that may not actually be eliminated by the new municipality
- Water capacity, referencing a letter from year 2000 limiting additions to the water system

Chris Parrott - Sussex resident and mayor, noted that that Sussex is now paying Wantage for many shared services; if Sussex made other arrangements, Wantage could lose income.

A Wantage resident (name not confirmed) expressed concern about rising taxes. He also asked about access to the report and was interested in specifics regarding cost savings. Mr. Snook explained that the final report is on file at the local library and available electronically on the Township and Borough websites.

Jim Doherty, Wantage resident and Township administrator, noted that the DCA study represents a snapshot in time. Based on that snapshot, the Commission explored other potential savings.

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

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSIONERS

It was moved by Ms. Flynn to accept the response from the NJDCA and recommend consolidation of the Borough of Sussex and the Township of Wantage, and that the question be placed on the ballot in November.. Ms. Hosking seconded the motion. By roll call:

In favor:

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

Opposed:

Mr. Jacobs (Wantage)

Absent:

Mr. Lagattuta (Sussex)
 Mr. Little (Sussex)

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

Mr. Jacobs listed the reasons for his opposition:

- The water and sewer require expensive rebuilding
- There are no other communities in the state with populations of 15,000 with State Police coverage
- More ratables means more COAH, more population
- He was named to the Commission to represent Wantage's interests, and he doesn't see the gain for Wantage in consolidation

Mr. Jacobs will prepare a minority response to be added to the final report.

Several Commissioners stated that the voters should make the decision and hoped that the voters would study the issues to make an informed decision. Mr. Snook expressed satisfaction with a job well done.

A motion was made by Mr. McKay to direct the consultants to develop a fact sheet for the public with concise information on consolidation, the cost of this additional work to be covered by the State. Mr. Dunn seconded the motion. Mr. Pfeiffer stated that the proper process would be for the consultants to submit an estimate for development of the information, mailing and other costs, all included in just one budget request. The motion was unanimously carried by voice vote.

Mr. Snook stated that he will be directing the Public Relations Subcommittee to organize another public session. October 19 was suggested as a tentative date. Ms. Hosking will check on availability of the High Point Regional High School auditorium.

OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

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

Leslie Coolong, Wantage Resident, expressed concern about the discrepancy between property tax valuation between the two municipalities. Mr. Pfeiffer responded that there would be a new equalization project using the County equalization ratio (the way school and county taxes are calculated).

Bill Gettler, Wantage resident, commended the Commissioners for their work, but restated his belief that consolidation is a disservice to Wantage. He noted that the tax credit would be available only to Wantage residents, not to businesses.

Jim Doherty, Wantage resident and Township administrator, commended the Commissioners for their work and expressed his confidence in the voters.

Tom Davis, Wantage resident, thanked the Commission for the opportunity to let the voters decide.

A Wantage resident (name not confirmed) asked about the source of funding to get the information to the public. Mr. Snook replied that the municipalities would not incur that cost.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Snook expressed appreciation for Mr. Lagattuta's work in preparing the final report. He thanked the Commissioners for working so well together.

With no other items for consideration, it was moved by Ms. Hosking, seconded by Ms. Flynn and unanimously carried by voice vote to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Snook declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Lee Abbott, Secretary