

# One community One government

The Joint Consolidation Study Commission  
of the Township of Wantage and the Borough of Sussex

Frequently asked questions

October 2009

## Answers concerning the consolidation of Sussex Borough and Wantage Township

### ***Will local property taxes increase as a result of consolidation?***

Taxpayers in both municipalities would see a reduction in their property tax bill, according to current estimates. If the new governing body adopts a lean budget as projected by the commission, an average Wantage property tax payer will see a reduction of about \$57 from the 2008 municipal tax bill of \$609 and an average Sussex taxpayer will see a reduction of about \$483 from the 2008 municipal tax bill of \$872.

In addition, the State of New Jersey has promised a \$500,000 grant if the new governing body adopts a 2011 budget without a consolidation-related tax increase. The grant can be used for reduction of debt or for capital projects.

However, there is no absolute answer to the tax question. Property taxes are levied by the County of Sussex, the Sussex-Wantage School District and the High Point Regional High School in addition to the local municipality. Also, the first consolidated municipal budget would not be adopted until early 2011, and conditions could change by then.

### ***Why should Wantage taxpayers assume the costs of the Sussex water and***

### ***sewer utilities?***

Wantage residents would not be assuming these costs. Utility users pay the cost of the utility services. The utilities operate based on revenues collected from the users, not tax dollars.

The consolidation commission's examination of the utility concluded that:

- There are sufficient revenues to fund debt service. The utility is self-liquidat-

### ***Frequently asked questions***

*Look inside for answers to more questions that people have been asking about consolidation.*

ing, meaning the utility users bear the full costs.

- As with older infrastructure everywhere, there are conditions and issues that need to be addressed. Infiltration and inflow of storm water and groundwater into the wastewater system is an issue with broad effects.
- Overall, the utilities are a great potential asset to a consolidated community. They provide a land-planning tool. They help the consolidated municipality meet its economic-development objectives. These advantages would not be available to either Sussex or Wantage as individual municipalities.

- Sussex is physically too small to provide the development opportunities offered by the utilities. Wantage would have no right to the excess capacity, and Sussex could sell this valuable resource to any town in the area, not just Wantage. In a consolidated town, the utilities would be used for the overall community good.

Finally, the utilities enhance the economies of scale of the consolidated municipality.

### ***Why should Sussex hand over the water and sewer utilities to Wantage?***

Each town would bring assets to the consolidation: roads, parks, buildings, and other facilities. Water and

sewer utilities are assets that the borough would bring. The assets of each municipality would be incorporated into the consolidated municipality. Neither would be "handing over" their assets. They would share all assets, because the two municipalities would be joined as one.

### ***How will the consolidated municipality save money for the taxpayer?***

Primarily through increased efficiency gained by having staff members perform

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the same duties for all residents together rather than separately. Duplicated positions are eliminated. There will be fewer people employed in the consolidated municipality than are currently employed in the two separate municipalities. A chapter in the commission's report, entitled "Possible Benefits and Drawbacks to Consolidation: Staffing," describes this in depth.

## **Will Wantage residents be forced to connect to sewer and water?**

No. While additional capacity can be found in the systems, there is not enough for widespread residential expansion. On the other hand, residents with failing wells or septic systems might be able to connect, if they are close enough to existing utility lines.

## **Will residents of either municipality lose any of their current municipal services?**

No. If voters approve consolidation of the municipalities, the current services for each municipality will continue for at least three years following the seating of the new governing body. During those three years, the governing body will have an opportunity to examine the costs and benefits of continuing to provide these services.

## **What about the second question on the ballot, concerning the new municipality being "subject to the Provisions of Title 11A, Civil Service?"**

The state requires the consolidation vote to include a question on whether the consolidated municipality's employees should be under the jurisdiction of Civil Service.

The state system governs hiring, promotions, discipline, and grievances. Seniority determines many

personnel practices under this system. It does not govern salaries and benefits, where employees retain the right to bargain collectively for wages and terms and conditions of employment.

A "Yes" vote means the state-wide personnel system will govern personnel actions in the new municipality.

A "No" vote will permit the new governing body to develop a personnel system designed specifically for the new government's needs. The new government may model its system on Civil Service rules, if it wishes, but local officials, not state employees, would have the final say.

## **What will happen to the fire departments and EMS squads in Wantage and Sussex?**

There will be no changes. These services will be overseen by a single governmental entity with jurisdiction over the entire area instead of the current two entities. Municipal aid will remain at current levels.

## **If the towns merge, will a local police department become mandatory?**

No. The decision to create a police department is at the discretion of the governing body. The study determined that there was no existing or expected requirement to change the current situation.

## **Will the merger cause any loss of jobs for DPW workers?**

No. Their current productivity levels are already high and the variety of work responsibilities will require the continued employment of all persons.

## **Won't consolidation cost Sussex its identity?**

No. Sussex will retain its turn-of-the-century charm and its downtown square and fountain. It will have the same ZIP code and the same narrow, hilly streets. Wantage, too, will retain its rural character, its farmland, and the historic names of Colesville and Beemerville and Plumbstock.

There are similar local examples: McAfee does not lose its identity to Vernon Township and Stockholm does not lose its identity to Hardyston.

## **Would consolidation reduce the cost of master plan updates?**

It would be much cheaper for a consolidated town to develop a new master plan than to develop plans individually for Sussex and Wantage. Economists and planners think that planning is much more rational and inclusive when it is not fragmented by artificial municipal boundary lines. Geographically, Sussex and Wantage are a single planning area.

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## **Members of the commission**

- Appointed by elected officials in each town
- Met 19 times over 13 months

**From Sussex:**  
Salvatore Lagattuta  
*vice chair*  
Pamela Flynn  
Alonzo Little  
Charles McKay  
Edward Meyer

**From Wantage:**  
Earl Snook  
*chair*  
Wayne Dunn  
Sharon Hosking  
Arthur Jacobs  
E. Gregory Kresge

## **How long have Sussex and Wantage been separate municipalities?**

The history of the two towns has always been symbiotic. Originally, Sussex Borough was part of Wantage, which incorporated in 1754. Sussex (then known as Deckertown) was part of Wantage Township until October 14, 1891, when it separated. In 1902, its name was changed to Sussex.

The octagon that forms

# ...one government

Sussex's boundaries was originally described in 1891 by the Independent newspaper (now the Wantage Recorder). Simply put, an iron stake was driven into Main Street, somewhere in the middle of the four buildings on the corners, and they carved a new borough out of Wantage.

While other areas such as Clove, Libertyville, Colesville, Beemerville, Plumbstock, Mt. Salem, and Lewisburg remained part of Wantage, Sussex Borough became an incorporated town. It has remained in this state for the past 107 years.

With the creation of Sussex Borough, the history as two separate towns began. Sussex was a part of Wantage for 137 years, 18 years longer than the it has been on its own. Now the two towns are

considering re-consolidation.

## ***Is the state forcing us to consolidate?***

No one is forcing the township and the borough to consolidate. Currently the state's Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission cannot force towns to consolidate.

After more than a year of study, the Sussex-Wantage Joint Consolidation Study Commission, composed of local residents, has recommended that Sussex and Wantage consolidate voluntarily. The ballot question on November 3 permits the voters of each municipality to freely choose to create a new municipality composed of Sussex and Wantage.

However, the state is currently studying a number of "donut hole" situations.

Legislation to mandate consolidation has been under discussion for several years.

## ***Will both towns survive if they remain separate?***

In the short run, yes. The long term consequences are not known. It is not clear how future state policies affecting municipal aid might impact Sussex or Wantage if they remain separate.

## ***What will change after consolidation?***

Economic development will be cooperative rather than competitive. Planning will consider the needs of both towns. Improvement projects will be coordinated. **Government will be smaller and more efficient.**

## **Text of questions appearing on the Nov 3 ballot**

### **First question: CONSOLIDATION**

The first question concerns consolidation of the two municipalities. It will read:

**Shall the Borough of Sussex and the Township of Wantage be consolidated into a single municipality to be known as the Township of Sussex-Wantage and governed under the Council-Manager Plan of the Optional Municipal Charter Law, with a separately elected Mayor and six (6) members of the Township Council to be elected at large with partisan elections and staggered terms of office?**

Voters will have the opportunity to vote

- For Consolidation       Against Consolidation

An interpretive statement will also appear on the ballot. It reads:

A vote FOR CONSOLIDATION will join the Borough of Sussex and the Township of Wantage as one municipality. Sussex-Wantage will be governed by one Mayor and six Township Council members. Partisan elections will occur every two years. This new governing body will select and supervise a professional municipal manager to oversee and supervise the day-to-day operations of the municipality. All financial, physical and other assets and liabilities of both current municipalities will be assumed by the newly consolidated municipality. The newly consolidated municipality will

be responsible for providing all municipal services to the residents of Sussex and Wantage. A vote AGAINST CONSOLIDATION will retain the current separate municipalities of Sussex Borough and Wantage Township.

### **Second question: CIVIL SERVICE**

The second question will determine whether the state Civil Service Commission will govern personnel decisions if the towns consolidate.

**Shall the consolidated municipality be subject to the Provisions of Title 11A, Civil Service?**

Voters will have the opportunity to vote

- Yes       No

The interpretive statement will read:

A YES vote on this question will place the newly consolidated municipality under the jurisdiction of the State of New Jersey Civil Service Commission, formerly known as the New Jersey Department of Personnel. Many personnel decisions will be directed by Civil Service regulations. A NO vote on this question will place personnel decisions such as hiring, promotion, discipline and discharge in the hands of the local government. Under either alternative, employees retain the right to bargain collectively for wages and terms and conditions of employment.

# *An opportunity to guide history*

On Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, voters in the Borough of Sussex and the Township of Wantage will make a historic decision concerning the future of the community and its two governmental entities.

*Should Sussex Borough and Wantage Township be consolidated into a single municipality, governed by an elected mayor and six-member council, with an appointed manager running day-to-day operations?*

**Sussex and Wantage residents should...**

- ✓ **Be informed**
- ✓ **Go to the polls**
- ✓ **Guide history**

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The Joint Consolidation Study Commission  
of the Township of Wantage and the Borough of Sussex

The work of the joint commission, including this pamphlet, was funded in full by grants from the State of New Jersey through its Department of Community Affairs.

This pamphlet answers questions about the work of the Joint Consolidation Study Commission and the issues it studied.

The commission's full 200-page report and its previous pamphlet are available at the Sussex and Wantage municipal buildings, the Sussex County Library, and on the Wantage Township website, [wantagewp.com](http://wantagewp.com)

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