

PRINCETON TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
April 27, 2009

A meeting of Princeton Township Committee and Princeton Borough Council was held on this date at 7:00 p.m. in the main meeting room of the Princeton Township Municipal Complex, 400 Witherspoon Street, to discuss consolidation issues between Princeton Township and Princeton Borough.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Clerk read the following statement.

The following is an accurate statement concerning the providing of notice of this meeting and said statement shall be entered in the minutes of this meeting.

Notice of this meeting as required by Sections 4a, 3d, 13 and 14 of the Open Public Meetings Act has been provided to the public in the form of a written notice. On April 14, 2009 at 4:50 p.m., said schedule was posted on the official bulletin board in the Municipal Building, transmitted to the Princeton Packet, the Trenton Times, the Trentonian, and the Town Topics, and filed with the Township Clerk.

ROLL CALL

The Township Clerk called the roll for Princeton Township.

Present: Mayor Miller and Mesdames Lempert and Nemeth and Messrs. Goerner and Liverman.

Absent: None.

The Borough Clerk called the roll for Princeton Borough.

Present: Mayor Trotman, and Mrs. Trelstad, Messrs. Goldfarb, Koontz, Martindell and Wilkes.

Absent: Mrs. Karcher.

Marc Pfeiffer, Deputy Director, New Jersey Division of Local Government Services, presented a power point presentation to the governing bodies outlining the new consolidation law. Mr. Pfeiffer indicated that New Jersey is not a traditional home rule state.

Mr. Pfeiffer discussed changes in the consolidation law that was enacted in 2007, suggesting that the process is easier with more flexibility with the law. The new law recognizes differences among the municipalities, look at likely tax increases, and address the question of municipal debt load by suggesting that each municipality maintain its debt obligations after consolidation.

Mr. Pfeiffer said that new laws like the “Uniform Shared Services Act” provide a framework for making consolidation happen by offering aid for feasibility studies and implementation costs and binding arbitration or fact finding panels to deal with disputes. Regarding towns where two police forces exist, the new law addresses whether there is legal protection of seniority, tenure and pension rights of law enforcement personnel.

Mr. Pfeiffer said that homeowners whose property is taxed at a higher rate due to consolidation would receive protection through fixed state funded credits which would remain with the homeowner until the property is sold. He added that tenants in rental properties that are revalued would receive a rebate if they are eligible under the existing tenant rebate law.

Mr. Pfeiffer emphasized the importance of open and candid discussion of objectives and how they should be achieved.

Ms. Lempert asked what would stop a study once it was underway. Mr. Pfeiffer said that finding that costs not being cost effective could end the study.

Mr. Pfeiffer encouraged the governing bodies to take each step at a time, reach conclusions, then move on to the next step. He cautioned not jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about what consolidation might or might not mean. He said that cost savings are only part of the reason for consolidating. Other important motives would be greater municipal efficiencies and the offering of more and better municipal services.

Davis Goldfarb said that he appreciated Mr. Pfeiffer’s efforts and this was all good advice. He suggested that the governing bodies move ahead very carefully making sure that everyone is on the same page before moving on to the next page, not making any assumptions. He said that he thought that we could move forward with the next two or three steps without mentioning the “c-word”.

Mr. Goerner said that he was a proponent of full municipal consolidation. He said that it was really important that we examine the comments and concerns of those on both sides of the issue and that Consolidation is the way forward for us to make better revenue decisions moving forward. Mr. Pfeiffer said that there is full flexibility in getting started with the process.

Mr. Koontz said that he is looking forward to hearing from the public on the issue of consolidation but the issue of increases in property taxes needs to be carefully looked at.

Mayor Trotman said there are those who are passionate on both sides of the issue and whose opinions must be considered.

Mayor Miller, a proponent of full consolidation said that it is a thorny issue about how costs are shared and to offer better municipal services at a lower cost one has to look at where the costs are – two police departments, public works and administrations.

Mayor Trotman said that state funding is being eaten away and asked if funding for the process renewed annually. Mr. Pfeiffer said that when the funding is gone, there is will be nothing left.

Stanley Smoyer, former Princeton resident, said that consolidation of the Princetons makes good sense.

Michael Morrandi, Battle Road said that it was not obvious that the two governing bodies will agree to go forward with the process.

Anthony Lunn said that he was not sure consolidation will save the municipalities money, suggesting that it was the schools that were causing the tax increases.

Jenny Crumiller said that she thought it was alright to move forward. She asked if there have been other police departments who have consolidated. Mr. Pfeiffer said there have been several small ones. Ms. Crumiller asked if both partial and full consolidation could be studied at the same time. Mr. Pfeiffer said they could.

Phyllis Marchand, Montadale Drive, asked whether meeting COAH affordable housing obligations would be complicated or suspended under a consolidation process. Mr. Pfeiffer said that COAH has indicated that it simply adds the former municipalities' obligations in tallying the COAH obligations of the new consolidated entity.

Mark Freda said that he has emailed the governing bodies documents outlining the benefits of one police department and how things could be addressed.

Ron Neilson said that contracts have exit clauses. Does consolidation? Mr. Pfeiffer said that it does not.

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Phyllis Tittlebaum asked who decides in the end whether the municipalities. Mr. Pfeiffer said that it would be part of the plan. Ms. Tittlebaum said that she is very concerned about not having a vote on this issue.

She was advised that both municipal bodies felt strongly that the issue should be put to a public vote.

David Cohen asked whether there are any services not permitted to be shared. Mr. Pfeiffer said that he hadn't heard of any.

Mayor Trotman thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting and asked that everyone keep open minds during the process.

Ms. Nemeth said that no one wanted to move forward in the process without public input.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Linda S. McDermott
Township Clerk