

*Joint Consolidation/ Shared Services Study Commission of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township*

*October 28, 2010*

**Joint Consolidation/ Shared Services Study Commission of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township**

**Minutes of the Special Meeting**

**Thursday, Oct. 28, 2010 7- 9 pm**

**John Witherspoon Middle School Auditorium**

**217 Walnut Lane Princeton, NJ**

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm, with Ms. Shabnam Salih reading the Open Public Meetings Act 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 the written notice attached hereto.

On October 8, 2010 at 2:00 p.m., said notice was posted in the official bulletin board, transmitted to the Princeton Packet, the Trenton Times, the Town Topics, filed with the Township Clerk and posted on the Princeton Borough and Princeton Township websites.

**2. Roll Call**

**Present:** Golden, Haynes, Metro, Miller, Goerner, Lilienthal, Lahnston, Simon, Small, Goldfarb, McCarthy, Trotman

**Absent:** None

**Special Note: About 30-32 members of the public present.**

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### **3. Introduction- Anton Lahnston**

Beginning the evening, Chairperson Lahnston introduces himself as the Chair of the Joint Consolidation and Shared Services Commission of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township and welcomes the members of the public to the meeting.

#### **a. Agenda**

Chairperson Lahnston outlines the agenda for the evening, as it is presented on the PowerPoint screen for view by the public.

#### **b. Commission Members**

Commission members introduce themselves to the public and add whether they are from the Township or Princeton, length of residency, their current jobs and role on the Commission.

Before moving onto the purpose of the evening, Chairperson Lahnston points out that Jim Pascale and Bob Bruschi, although not present, are important supporters of the Commission. The Chairperson also notes that this current Commission is different from past consolidation commissions as it includes mayors, township and borough members and different statutory requirements.

#### **c. Purpose**

Chairperson Lahnston outlines the purpose of the evening for the public.

1 To begin and open and on going dialogue with the community

2 To overview the work the Commission has just started

3 To introduce the website to the public to encouragement community

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engagement

**d. CGR Team- Joe Stefko, Scott Sittig, John Fry**

Chairperson Lahnston introduces the consultant team to the public and Joe Stefko refers to the Powerpoint for background on CGR as well as more detailed information on the qualifications of the CGR team. He also discusses CGR's philosophy as an objective and fact based one.

**4. The Process for Getting the Work Done- Project Methodology-CGR**

Scott Sittig refers to the Powerpoint to discuss the team's project methodology. Scott explains Phase 1 of the project as the Baseline Review and Phase 2 as Review of Options. He then outlines the project timeframe.

**5. Introduction to the Website- CGR**

Joe Stefko explains the Commission's and CGR's need and desire for strong public engagement throughout this process. He states that the role of CGR is to inform the Commission on the range of options available in this circumstance.

Stefko also shares the website ( [HYPERLINK "http://www.cgr.org/princeton"](http://www.cgr.org/princeton) [www.cgr.org/princeton](http://www.cgr.org/princeton)) with the public and encourages their viewing of it. Further, he outlines the ability to email the Commission and sign up for email alerts through the website.

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Chairperson Lahnston adds that the website is very accessible and useful and once again encourages the members of the public to utilize the site in staying informed on the Commission's work.

Before moving onto the public comments portion of the meeting, the Chairperson outlines ground rules for the comments.

Use microphones, identify yourself and add whether you are from the Township or Borough

Limit your comments to 3 minutes

Be additive, please do not repeat

We want to hear from everyone so please speak up

## **6. Comments and Questions from the Public- the Commission and CGR**

### **1. Peter Marks – Borough Resident**

Have you suggested against consolidation in the previous 40 towns you have studied?

Did anyone besides David Goldfarb come into Commission with skepticism to consolidation?

Stefko answers yes, (Corinth, NY) that there have been examples in his work where the team has recommended against consolidation. ("The juice was not worth the squeeze.") He expanded that consolidation was not the correct option in that town however their study was still additive in that other efficiencies were recommended.

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Small adds that she is waiting for the results of the study and although she voted against consolidation in the 1997, times have changed and we must look at all possible ways to save money.

Haynes explains she voted in favor of consolidation in past and in her past community. She adds that she sees the goal of her work as making our community the most financially efficient as possible and is also waiting for the results of the study.

Metro states that he is looking at this issue from a problem solving approach and going into this work without preconceived notions.

Golden adds that she is open minded, that consolidation might achieve some efficiencies and is waiting to see the study.

Goerner explains that he is pro consolidation, explains the Local Options Act and hopes that there will be some increased focus on the governance aspect of consolidation versus mainly financial.

Lilienthal explains that he sees a divergence in priorities between the Borough and the Township and is very interested in seeing where the facts lead. He is also focused on issues concerning shared services.

Mayor Miller explains his role in past consolidation efforts. He adds that he is focused on fact finding and the more efficient delivery of services.

Goldfarb is interested in the ideas that come out of this process.

Mayor Trotman did not support consolidation in the past but is going into this process with an open mind and will not make up her mind until all the data has been gathered. She will vote on whether or not consolidation is in the best interest of Borough residents and takes note that a lot has changed since 1997.

Simon explains that he sees vast efficiencies in consolidation but has an open mind in terms of the effects. He also notes the Local Options Act.

Chairperson Lahnston ends by adding that he voted in favor of consolidation in (1997) and is trying not to form an opinion until all the data is available.

2. Ann Neumann – Borough Resident

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Neumann shares that she is beginning to be skeptical of shared services and includes the library location issues and the recent university negotiations to increase its payment in lieu of taxes and a pattern of larger increases in property taxes as part of her skepticism. She asks why there is such a change between the township and borough in regards to increases in property taxes in the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood?

Goldfarb answers that reevaluation has changed from the past and that the Township overall has more expensive properties than the Borough Thus Township residents in the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood saw a greater effect on their property taxes than their neighbors in the Borough.

3. Kate Warren- Borough Resident

Warren has two concerns: she asks of consultants to make reports available to the public before meetings so that the public has time to digest the information and to come with informed and meaningful questions.

Stefko answers yes.

Also, there is talk about a possible lawsuit regarding reevaluation, how could that process impact the study?

Stefko answers he has no substantive answer on that point at the moment and will look into this issue.

4. Kip Cherry- Township Resident

Cherry explains that she is glad the Commission is looking into this important issue especially at a time when the community is distracted with reevaluation. She suggests that the relatively small turnout reflects that distraction rather than lack of

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interest in consolidation. She recommends that as the Commission identifies shared services that make sense before the referendum, that the Commission enact the changes and to not hold off on any possible efficiency. She adds focus should be on police dispatchers. She also mentioned a single tax assessment office (there is already only a single assessor shared by both Borough and Township) and fire safety as areas that could be combined and implemented right away.

Her issues of concern in a consolidated Princeton are that community members be able to maintain the current level of contact with governing representatives and that the downtown continue to be adequately supported. She expressed the requirement that people must know how things will work as we move forward.

Chairperson Lahnston states that CGR will not limit their study of shared services to police and public works

5. Sandra Persichetti- Township Resident

Persichetti states that she is in favor of consolidation and expressed that there should be less focus on financial ramifications and more on the excess of staff and governance between the Township and the Borough. She is Ex. Dir. of Princeton Community Housing. She commented on confusion at PCH senior housing site located partially in Borough and partially in Township - some apartments are in one municipality, some in the other, so some residents vote in Borough elections and some in Township elections. Also, during the construction phase, cumbersome and time consuming to deal with two building departments, two engineers, etc.

6. Lance Liverman- Township Resident- Member of the Township Committee

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Liverman comments that data should be considered but also the intangible issues of a possible consolidation must be taken into account and that asks how the cultural issues will be taken into account in the study.

Chairperson Lahnston explains that the Commission is very much aware of that issue and that increased community engagement, the relevant subcommittee, Community Engagement and CGR's thorough study will be sure to address cultural issues of concern.

7. Yina Moore- Borough Resident

Moore asks what the consultants will be doing to evaluate more than just the financial efficiencies of a possible "marriage" or consolidation between the two Princetons? Do we share the same ideals? She asks whether this is "a marriage for love or for money?" The Library indicated a divergence in views on issues of land use. One community believes in contracting for trash collection services, the other believes in providing the service. Charter schools is an idea that came into use in the Township. With respect to affordable housing, the Borough did not use the regional contribution approach of giving the money to Trenton that the Township did. If dollars and cents were the only issue, we would not have a downtown library, rather a library system with satellite branches. Her point was that issues are not only quantitative.

Scott Sittig answers that typically in cases like the Princetons, the study usually arises out of a financial concern then halfway through the issues begin to elicit strong emotions from parties involved and there is a rise to the surface of intangible issues. CGR will bring these issues into their study and these values will become a part of the discussion. CGR is clear that this issue is very much a serious concern and the study is not solely data driven.

8. Charlie Yedlin- Township Resident

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Yedlin comments that departments in the Township and Borough, although effective and competent are excessive, redundant and create some confusion in his line of work, which is construction. He has had projects where half is in the Borough and half in the Township He also comments that if it's to be more than public works and police, what's left., i.e. it is strange to have shared services but separate governance structures.

9. Scott Sullivan - Township Resident

Sullivan commented that it all gets down to questions of governance. The Township favors cost efficiency and so it favors consolidation. The Borough favors shared services so that as equal partners with the Township, each can veto the other.

Sullivan asks if it is possible to look at other possibilities, other than the two extremes, for example, would it be possible for the Borough to contract services from the Township, using the Stony Brook Sewerage Authority as a model. He also asks how the Commission will decide on their final recommendation, whether it is a majority vote. And does that mean that consolidation is dead on arrival

Goldfarb answers that according to the Commissions by-laws, a majority of the representatives of each municipality must approve any recommendation.

10. Township Resident

Gentleman asks if the 40 other studies CGR has done have all focused on consolidation. Or shared services?

Stefko explains that of the 40 case studies mentioned earlier in the meeting, those all focused on some type of consolidation and a combination of shared services.

Gentleman follows up questions by asking if those studies can be made available to the public.

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Stefko answers yes and explains that the most current study for Chester, NJ is available at [www.cgr.org/chester](http://www.cgr.org/chester)

11. Sheila Berkelhammer - Borough Resident

Berkelhammer, having lived in both the Township and the Borough, warns the consultants to “be prepared for silliness”, e.g. “Princeton Township is different from Princeton Borough, adding that most people have no idea where the boundary lines are. She also warned that we would hear many silly claims, in particular the claim that Borough residents are different than Township residents and vice versa. She noted that some homes are split between the two municipalities.

12. Kristen Appelget representing– Princeton University

Appelget, reading a prepared statement, commended the elected officials in that it’s an important discussion for the community to have. She also thanked the commission members. In her statement, she commented that the University sees benefits in shared services and currently enjoys the benefits and encourages future use of regional planning boards. She also discusses the voting problems students of the University have due to the border lines of the Township and Borough running through the University. She also stated that the search for cost savings must be balanced by consideration for the distinctive characteristics of the community. She offered the University as a resource for the Commission.

13. Roland Miller – Borough Resident

Following up on the earlier question re not recommending consolidation to Corinth, Miller asked how many other communities had the consultant found where “the juice was not worth the squeeze.”

Stefko answered that there were many and that change is tough. One community voted in its referendum for consolidation, although the savings were only 2-1/2% In

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November 2008, a community south of Binghamton defeated a consolidation referendum, although the savings were 26%., showing that cost savings are but one aspect of the issue.

14. Steve Hiltner – Borough Resident

Hiltner discusses the difficulties about complaints in one Princeton if residing in another, for example where he lives in the Borough it's mainly residential but a few blocks further in the Township, houses have been converted to businesses. Therefore he is worried that the Township is less protective of residents than the Borough is in the same neighborhood. Another example is that people in the Littlebrook area seem to flout the Township leaf ordinance (they don't clear their leaves) making the streets hazardous. Thus will Borough people be disenfranchised and it is therefore important to show that the whole will be greater than its parts. One benefit he saw is that in his view, the Borough lacks an integrated vision for the parks and that consolidation could lead to better stewardship of the parks.

15. Bill Moran- Borough Resident

Moran states he has voted against consolidation two times however is keeping an open mind this time and that he is focused on environmental issues, affordable housing, aging in place and the local independent business community.

16. Ann Neumann - Borough Resident [one of first commenters]

Neumann encourages working with other communities for better regional planning. For example, the joint planning board should work with other planning boards in the region.

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## **7. Adjournment**

Chairperson Lahnston thanks the public for coming to the meeting and encourages the audience to bring more individuals to the public meeting. He welcomes comments and continued communication to help the Commission move forward in its work.

Goldfarb emphasizes that the Commission and CGR should reach out to Kristen Appleget, who offered any communication, efforts or assistance the University can provide.

Simon adds that the members of the public who have been involved with different commissions should contribute to the Commission's work and reach out for more information.

Mayor Miller thanks the public for attending and shares that it is natural for both communities and residents of the communities to be working for their best interests and that each Princeton acts independently and different at times.

Goerner adds that it must be noted that this is not potential takeover but a potential merger.

Chairperson Lahnston thanks the public and closes the meeting at 9:00 pm.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Shabnam Salih, Study Commission Secretary**

Approved: November 17, 2010

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