

## Distressing discussion

York officials are right to start talking about the possibility of state intervention.

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### **At bottom:** - AT A GLANCE

Jan 9, 2007 — The topic of a forum slated for this afternoon by York Mayor John Brenner certainly isn't a happy one.

But unfortunately, it's something the city needs to talk about: The possibility of being declared a "financially distressed" city by the state.

York was able to pass a budget for this year by making some cuts and increasing some taxes and fees. But the enormity of its fiscal situation will make that increasingly difficult to do each year as we approach 2010 - when the city is projected to face a deficit of some \$7 million.

How can the city bridge that gap without raising property taxes to the point where its mostly low-income population simply won't be able to afford them?

It can't.

So Act 47 - a financial distress declaration - looks more and more like a realistic option. It would mean more state money. But it also means more control by the state, which might make budget decisions city residents and officials won't like.

What other choices do we have?

Well, Mayor Brenner is hoping Democratic control of the state House could bring legislation that would provide the city with some new revenue sources.

That would be wonderful - especially if such an effort tapped residents from the city's more prosperous surrounding municipalities to help pay for the profusion of tax-exempt government, religious and nonprofit properties in York.

An even better approach would be for those municipalities to voluntarily help the city through regional efforts. With David Rusk slated to speak in York on Wednesday, this is a topic that should be on all of our minds.

The people at YorkCounts have been working hard on their Metro-York project, designed to come up with a specific action plan to find regional solutions to the problems Mr. Rusk astutely diagnosed more than a decade ago.

Could any such effort be enough to head off the need for state intervention?

That seems doubtful.

But we remain hopeful that the state Legislature will soon respond to the plight of our urban areas. Many of them are at a structural disadvantage - with weak tax bases and no room or way to expand.

New Castle, just outside of Pittsburgh, was recently declared a distressed city.

It's time for the people in Harrisburg to realize that many, if not most, of our state's small cities are distressed. Perhaps not "officially," but they're financially distressed just the same. Our state's municipal financing structure is flawed.

It needs to be addressed.

Who has the political courage to start talking seriously about the situation - and more importantly, do something about it?

## AT A GLANCE

**What:** York County Issues Forum

**When:** Noon to 1:30 p.m. today

**Where:** In the Lafayette Room at the Yorktowne Hotel

**Topic:** Economic health of municipalities in York County