

## Metro-York offers preview, sees support for regional plans

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The civic group Metro-York is likely to propose some form of tax-base sharing, greater public-safety cooperation and a regional forum for land-use planning when it makes formal recommendations this summer, co-chair Eric Menzer said.

Meanwhile, leaders have found broad support among the public and elected officials for regional approaches to problems in York County's urban core, Menzer said at a Feb. 28 briefing. The event was intended as an update on Metro-York's work, which Menzer said was about halfway done.

Metro-York has the broad goal of halting fiscal distress, concentrated poverty, educational inequity and other urban problems. Leaders argue that these troubles are certain to spread from York city into surrounding areas. The group is a project of YorkCounts, a coalition that runs various initiatives to improve the county's quality of life.

A poll of 400 county residents conducted between May and June 2006 found broad support for regional policies, said James DeBord, director of YorkCounts. Menzer cited those results at the briefing. He also said it was a mistake to assume elected officials would balk at inter-municipal cooperation. That stereotype may once have been true, but it no longer holds, he said. Menzer is vice president of Wagman Construction Inc. in Manchester Township.

Menzer said tax-base-sharing recommendations were likely to be based on the model of the Twin Cities area in Minnesota. York County has some municipalities with model land-use policies, but they are still too fragmented, Menzer said. The county should not necessarily do all planning, but it may be possible to set up a Council of Governments or another inter-municipal forum to deal with land use, he said. He provided no specifics on how the group envisions greater public-safety cooperation.

Menzer also provided few specifics on likely education recommendations, except to say that the key problem the group wants to tackle was the concentration of many poor children within a single school.

Springettsbury Township supervisor Don Bishop did not attend the briefing, but he agreed in a telephone interview that there is more interest among elected officials in regional cooperation.

"I think it's a whole lot more imperative," he said. Bishop also owns the information-technology consulting firm Affinigent Inc., based in Springettsbury Township.

Still, if there is broad agreement on the principle of regional action, the execution could be difficult, Bishop said. Tax-base sharing is one example.

"While I agree that they almost have to propose something like that and at some level it makes sense, I have a real concern as kind of a steward, in a small way, of Springettsbury Township tax dollars," Bishop said. He's concerned about losing oversight of those tax dollars.

In an aside, the other Metro-York co-chair, William H. Simpson, said he was concerned about the possibility that York might have to enter the state's program for fiscally distressed municipalities. That could send a negative signal to people considering whether to do business in the area, he said.

"If we have to go there ... I'm afraid that it's going to have (a) very serious impact on how people view our community," he said. Simpson is the vice chairperson of York-based Susquehanna Real Estate.

The audience of about 30 was sparse compared with the crowds that showed up for other Metro-York events. The group's next event, a daylong public hearing, was scheduled for March 7, after the Business Journal went to press.