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## Police merger timely idea

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Consolidation of York City's police force with departments in Springettsbury, Spring Garden and West Manchester townships and the York Area Regional Police is an agency of the imagination today, but it's the right idea at the right time.

And while area police officials say the idea for such a merger is still in its infancy, now is the moment for area police and township officials to begin more than preliminary discussions.

The annual Uniform Crime Report -- self reporting by more than 1,000 police agencies -- indicates a statewide increase in serious crime of 1.4 percent between 2005 and 2006.

Then there are the Central Pennsylvania numbers -- serious crime up 4.5 percent. Leading the violations: robbery, burglary and arson.

That's only a one-year jump. As York City Police Commissioner Mark Whitman said recently, "crime will continue to escalate if we don't attack it in a different fashion. If we stay as is, we're going to be in trouble in five years, 10 years. Will (the greater York area) be livable in 20 years?"

If ever there was a reason for traditional Pennsylvania attitudes -- those that, citing "local control" frown on school district or municipal consolidations -- to be laid aside, it's in the service of a peaceable community, equitably policed.

That it will be expensive in terms of taxation is obvious. There also will be issues of agency control which will have to be so delineated as to have the chain of command, and operation of any new regional force immune from petty bickering between municipalities.

Designing the system will be difficult, and operations early on will certainly have kinks to be worked out.

But society's battle with crime will not get easier in the foreseeable future. The police professionals will have their ideas, as will elected county, municipal and state officials.

As York City's Whitman noted, the groundswell for such a department is from John Q. Citizen. Now it's up to their elected officials to respond.

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