



## What hurdles are in the way?

**Metro-York's top challenge: selling its ideas to the public**

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Nov 18, 2007 — Tom Foust has been involved in planning initiatives to improve life around York County since 1990, and he's disappointed that the Metro-York recommendations released Thursday call for more task forces to address the issues.

The York City School Board member said he thought that much of the background work had already been done and that the report would offer recommendations with more substance.

“(The initiatives) always break down on the implementation side,” Foust said. “They break down because it's one study after another study after another study.”

But representatives of Metro-York, a YorkCounts organization that looks for regional solutions to problems across the county, say they already have appointed volunteers to chair some of the recommendations and drive them forward.

Some of the ideas already have traction, such as

the consolidated police department, and the work is now task-specific.

Building consensus in the community takes time, Metro-York co-chairman Eric Menzer said. For example, he doesn't believe that many people were ready to consider a consolidated police force five years ago.

But a study conducted by Metro-York in spring 2006 shows that times have changed. The majority of the 403 county residents surveyed supported creating regional police forces, the report states.

Crime is affecting the region, and people are seeing that on the front pages of the newspaper, Menzer said.

It's also important to accomplish the initiatives right the first time around, Menzer said. Failure could set a community back for years.

“Boy, do I wish we could make more progress faster,” he said.

The recommendations involve short-, medium- and long-term goals, Menzer said. For example, raising the \$3 million annually to keep students from dropping out of school could be done in the short-term.

Officials wouldn't have to create a new program. They could use one or more that's already in existence, such as Quantum Opportunities, the report states.

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The question is whether the community has the willingness to try to raise the money, such as through federal and state funds and a capital campaign, Menzer said.

Other recommendations, such as the regional planning, would take a long time. Elected officials already devote a huge amount of time to their municipalities, and they'd have to be willing to spend another few years in evening meetings to accomplish this goal, Menzer said.

Some people say that Metro-York has good ideas, but they're going to have to sell them to the community.

Ahmad Seifullah of York said that Metro-York's recommendations are right on time. But to help bring the community on board, the organization should find leaders who are respected in their communities so they could explain the efforts.

York City Councilwoman Toni Smith said the organization can put the information on the Internet, but spreading the information will have to involve word-of-mouth. She's willing to speak to people about the ideas.

Residents will want to understand what's in it for them, Smith said.

To Sue Krebs, who is co-chairing a task force on an education recommendation, the big picture is that York needs to be competitive in a post-manufacturing economy.

York has a great geographical location, but it also has to offer restaurants, entertainment and other interests in order to draw businesses to the area.

"People are not going to move to York to go to the Galleria," Krebs said. "That's why the health of the city is so important."

Lisa Wingert, vice chairwoman of the Manchester Township board of supervisors and a substitute teacher, said the regional police idea isn't new for her municipality.

Manchester Township joined with other municipalities in 1972 to receive services from Northern York County Regional Police, and she is pleased with the service they have. It helps the township save money and get more bang for their buck, Wingert said.

She questions why some of the remaining, smaller departments haven't joined them over the years.

Wingert said she agrees there has to be some reward for people in order for them to support these ideas.

People chose where to live based on work, location, the school district and taxes.

If people send their children to city schools, there would have to be some sort of incentive, such as offering college scholarships as the Kalamazoo, Mich. public schools do for its graduates.

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But there's also the issue of finding money to support such ideas.

"That they're going to have to work on," she said.

**Metro-York's recommendations**

Here is a synopsis of the recommendations made by Metro-York:

**- Establish a Metro-York consolidated police department:**

York City, Spring Garden, Springettsbury, York Area Regional and West Manchester departments are already engaged in conversation, but participation would ideally go beyond these areas.

**- Engage in additional meaningful regional planning**, ideally incorporating all of the municipalities in the heart of York County:

The best of the existing plans should be coordinated, enhanced and integrated into a comprehensive plan for the region. It should address land use, infrastructure, transportation, housing affordability and tax consequences.

**-Reform local taxation** through a local tax study commission:

It should include elected officials from each municipality and school district in the region, to study and adopt an approach that is equitable and stable - and serve the region's long-

term interests.

**- Study ideas for modernizing York County's form of government:**

Are three commissioners enough to represent a county with more than 416,000 residents? Is county government as effective and accountable as it could be? It's time for a countywide task force to study which form of government would be best for York County.

**- Establish a permanent and well-funded Metro-York Schools Consortium** to research, develop and implement new public school models and make sure all schools in York County are world-class:

One or more area colleges should convene a team of the best-and-brightest minds - superintendents and administrators, business leaders and others - to serve as a "think tank" focused on improving student performance, bolstering mentoring capacities, encouraging parental involvement and outlining cutting-edge curriculum aligned with workforce needs and unrestrained by time or geography.

**-Attack the root problem:** A school district can't succeed when poverty and its related problems are concentrated the way they are in the city schools.

A task force would work on new academic programming that appeals to parents throughout the county with the added benefit that it would result in interaction between city, suburban and

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rural students. Enrollment would be voluntary. It also would look at education-based incentives for middle-class parents to return to the city with their children.

**-Invest \$3 million per year** for the next 10 years in "intensive care" **for at-risk students:** intense, targeted programming as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or middle and high school to keep them from thinking that dropping out is an option:

A sudden infusion of money won't fix the system, but it would help many students now. Hundreds of teenagers are dropping out of school, and hundreds of kindergartners are entering school under-prepared for learning. This is an urgent call for investment in and the implementation of one or more existing programs identified as the best by education experts.

**- Use the soon-to-be established Office of Workforce Development** as a catalyst to strengthen relationships between employers and the Metro-York workforce:

It is imperative that pathways out of poverty be created for adults who find themselves alienated from employment today. A county Office of Workforce Development is being established at the York County Economic Development Corporation.

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