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YorkCounts begins push for police merger study

SHAREE MCFADDEN *For The York Dispatch*

Article Last Updated: 07/14/2008 10:47:33 AM EDT

YorkCounts announced its **push** for a study into the possible **merger** of York-area **police** departments last month; last week, the group began looking for municipalities willing to participate.

After hearing a **YorkCounts** presentation Thursday night, Spring Garden commissioner John Fulmer said he and his fellow commissioners couldn't make an immediate decision.

But as president of the Spring Garden board, he said he's not opposed to the idea of consolidating public safety forces, pointing to the recent **merger** of the Springettsbury and Spring Garden fire departments.

The commissioners made a motion to discuss the proposal and said they will make a decision in the coming weeks about participating in the study.

YorkCounts has been studying a variety of issues and their effect on York County. The **push** for a public safety study comes from a Metro-York initiative focusing on the heart of the county -- York City and the surrounding municipalities, explained Carl Anderson, co-chairman for the **YorkCounts** public safety task force.

First up: Thursday's pitch to Spring Garden Township was the task force's first. Tuesday, members will discuss the study with the York City Council. They also plan to approach Springettsbury Township, West Manchester Township and West York, the other nearby municipalities with stand-alone **police** forces.

With more than 20 municipalities in the heart of the county, the task force is looking for at least two to spearhead the study, with

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hopes the rest will follow. They are also offering municipalities an opportunity to name a member to serve on a public safety committee, which will participate in and help coordinate the study.

The public safety study will examine the efficiency of **police** protection today and evaluate whether that would improve with a consolidation of some of the **police** departments, said David Meckley, the other co-chairman of the **YorkCounts** task force.

The goal: The task force said it believes a consolidated **police** department will benefit the area by improving public safety, avoiding a duplication of services, improving officer training and streamlining hiring.

Meckley said they also expect to see costs decrease over the long run.

And while the initial focus will be on the municipalities with stand-alone departments, Metro-York indicated at the meeting it is also hoping for participation from municipalities that already receive **police** protection from a regional **police** force.

That group would include municipalities covered by the Northern York County Regional **Police** Department and the York Area Regional **Police** Department. Northern York handles Dover, Manchester, Franklin, Jackson, Paradise and Conewago townships and Dover, Dillsburg and North York boroughs. York Area Regional covers Dallastown, Red Lion, Yoe, Jacobus, Windsor and Felton boroughs, and Windsor, North Hopewell and York townships.

Everyone welcome: However, any York County municipality interested in participating in the study is encouraged to do so, Meckley and Anderson said.

The public safety study would be conducted by PERF, the **Police** Executive Research Forum, a membership organization of **police** executives. It is currently involved in a **police** study in Berks County.

The estimated cost of the study is \$50,000 to \$65,000, which **YorkCounts** hopes to pay with state grant funding, said Beau Boughamer, spokesman for **YorkCounts**.

YorkCounts representatives said they hope to have commitments to join the study in place by the beginning of the fall.

-- Reach Sharee McFadden at news@yorkdispatch.com or call 505-5427.

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