

# West Manchester, police officers against regionalization

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As West [Manchester](#) Township and its police officers negotiate a new contract, both sides say the final agreement should include a clause preventing the department from joining a regional force.

The West [Manchester](#) Township Police Officers Association, the officer's bargaining unit, asked for the clause and township officials support the proposal, which would last the length of the contract, likely either three or five years, said township manager Kelly Kelch.

This comes as county municipalities -- including [York](#), West [York](#), Mount Wolf, Manchester [borough](#), and Dover, Manchester, Springettsbury and Spring Garden Townships -- are involved in a YorkCounts workgroup to discuss creating a regional force.

That group does not yet have a timetable for creating a final report, much less establishing a centralized department. Still, YorkCounts officials would have liked West Manchester Township, which shares a border with West York, York and Dover, Manchester and Spring Garden Townships, to be at the table.

"To see a municipality take an explicit step of saying we don't want under any circumstances to be a part of regional policing is disappointing," communications director Dan Fink said.

But West Manchester officials and police say a non-regionalization clause makes the most sense for the township, its officers and its taxpayers.

"It puts everybody's minds at ease," said Matt Emig, president of the officers association. "Job security is number one when you're negotiating a contract. Having it written into the contract is important."

The current contract expires at the end of the year. Kelch expects the new contract to be finished within the next two months.

Since the language has yet to be finalized, Emig did not want to comment on specific provisions. The township agreed to the idea, Kelch said, because it doesn't believe it would receive equal or superior service under a regional force. He offered these reasons:

--- West Manchester doesn't have the same level of violent crime as other municipalities, meaning officers in a regional force would spend more time outside the township.

--- A regional force would likely have to pay for new officers to bolster the ranks of current departments that he said are undermanned. These new officers would then be placed in other municipalities.

A regional force could also be stuck paying for the under-funded pension plans of some current municipal departments.

--- A regional force would create a larger bargaining unit, which he said would lead to higher police salaries and benefits, both costs to taxpayers.

When the contract runs out, Kelch said, the township could see if those concerns have been alleviated.

Steve Hovis is the chairman of the YorkCounts public safety committee that is organizing the discussions. West Manchester, he said, needs to come to its own conclusions on regionalization.

"Honestly, any municipality that is going to be considering regionalized police service or any service needs to be comfortable that it's the right decision for them," Hovis said.

Still, he said the concerns of the township and its officers can potentially be addressed.

"The whole purpose of regionalization is to create better police services for the municipalities because you can have more sophisticated police coverage for all the municipalities," Hovis said. "Any issue that any municipality has needs to be looked at, discussed and addressed with that municipality."

#### THE RECOMMENDATION

When Metro-York workgroups made recommendations for improving [York County](#) to the YorkCounts board, creating a regional police force topped its list. Here was the recommendation:

Just as criminals are not constrained by municipal boundaries, our police should not be hamstrung by them, or by the uncertainty of annual budget debates. This department should be created using a model more permanent than a contract between municipalities -- assuring that its viability would not be threatened by inflexible funding formulas. Township, [Borough](#) and City officials should not be satisfied simply with contributing certain percentages to a pot; rather, they should identify and establish a separate revenue source, such as a Community Safety tax, but not a property tax add-on.