

The push for regional police in York

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As the notion of police regionalization begins to brew in Lancaster's public sphere, recent efforts in York provide a glimpse of how this dialog could develop in our community.

Coordinated largely by the nonprofit YorkCounts, five municipalities, including the City of York, are now close to ordering a public safety study that would explore the possibility of a consolidated police force. To reach this point, however, regionalization advocates in York have had to work past considerable opposition and indifference from area municipalities.

The effort began in late 2007, when the Metro-York study group (an offshoot of YorkCounts) released a list of recommendations for improving York County. Priority number one was the formation of a York metropolitan police department.

YorkCounts representatives then invited 24 area municipalities to jointly pursue a study of police regionalization. Only nine of these municipalities accepted the invitation: York City, East Manchester Township, Manchester Township, Manchester Borough, Spring Garden Township, Springettsbury Township, Mount Wolf Borough, Dover Township, and West York Borough.

The \$50,000-60,000 study would be conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum and would be funded by a Shared Municipal Services Grant from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development.

According to Dan Fink, a spokesman for YorkCounts, many municipal leaders in the area immediately resisted the proposal, even though it was merely an exploratory measure. Fink asserted that this is because the people of York *"like their small municipal form of government, and they like to have control over the services that the government provides, including police."*

Also, Fink said, some leaders hesitated at the thought of sharing services with the city: *"A lot of elected officials and constituents feel that this is an effort created to help the city [manage] crime that they can't take care of on their own."* From Fink's perspective, this kind of opposition stems from a distinct *"us versus them"* mentality.

In July, to the frustration of consolidation advocates, both West Manchester Township and the West Manchester Township Police Officers Association agreed that their forthcoming contract would contain a clause prohibiting their department from participating in any regionalized police force. Association President Matt Emig told the *York Daily Record* that the restriction was requested due to fears that regionalization could result in the loss of jobs.

Further complicating matters, it was recently announced that funding for the State's Shared Municipal Services Grant has been zeroed out in the 2010 budget. Fink, however, is confident that alternative funding can and will be arranged.

Hurdles aside, the process in York has provided a model for how intermunicipal dialog can be initiated. YorkCounts—which Mayor Rick Gray once compared to the Lancaster Alliance—catalyzed the process simply by “*knocking on a lot of doors,*” as Fink described it. And, although this nonprofit took the lead in promoting a study for York, Fink noted that an effort like this could also be driven by officials in the public sector. In Berks County, for example, a county-wide regionalization study was recently solicited by the County Commissioners.

According to Fink, this effort has mostly required YorkCounts representatives to “meet people where they are,” finding ways to approach local leaders in a “*non-threatening*” environment. “*I don't think there's any shortcut to getting it done,*” Fink said, “*Over here it really took a lot of persistence and one-on-one meetings where someone from [YorkCounts] would meet with municipal officials individually, explain what Metro-York recommended and what we'd like to do.*”

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