

Movers & Shakers 2009: Regionalism

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Central Pennsylvania isn't the best example of a community that excels at sharing. For years, counties and municipalities in the region have butted heads over efforts to regionalize services.

Three York County municipalities recently rejected a proposal to merge with Newberry Township. Numerous businesses and individuals have fought for more than a decade to bring a regional commuter rail line to the midstate by way of the Harrisburg-based Modern Transit Partnership, but construction has yet to begin. Cumberland County used to team up with Dauphin and Perry counties to promote tourism but pulled out in 2005 to create its own visitors bureau.

While some efforts have fizzled, there have been successful initiatives thanks to the hard work of a few dedicated individuals and groups. Springettsbury and Spring Garden townships in York County merged their fire departments in 2008, for example. Eleven Lancaster County municipalities came together a few years ago to create a community comprehensive plan. The Southwestern Regional Police Department and the York Area Regional Police Department were created several years ago and represent a handful of municipalities in York County. And three fire companies in the Carlisle area are in the process of trying to consolidate into one.

These projects are the just the tip of the iceberg for an area as segmented as Central Pennsylvania. There are more than 200 local governing bodies in Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties. The road to regionalism is rocky and seemingly never-ending, but the endeavors are necessary if our communities want to progress by operating efficiently and effectively while remaining attractive to businesses.

How can we change?

One way the business community can reach out and encourage regionalism in Central Pennsylvania is by providing financial support for organizations that are looking to perform studies related to regionalism or hire experts to analyze a potential opportunity for regionalization.

Business leaders also can make their voices heard by local government and elected officials and express their interest and support of regional efforts. Talking to local organizations about the benefits of consolidation can help as well.

And rather than just talk about the idea of regionalism, business leaders need to dig in and have more meaningful, thoughtful discussions about what kinds of regional approaches make or don't make sense. By getting involved and stepping up to analyze the options, businesses can intelligently and effectively help solve community problems.

Leading by example

James Shultz

*development manager at Charter Homes & Neighborhoods
Lancaster County*

James Shultz's education background, career and volunteer work all point to his passion for cities.

Shultz is the development manager at Lancaster County-based [Charter Homes & Neighborhoods](#). He has been on the board of [10,000 Friends Of Pennsylvania](#), a land-use policy alliance based in Harrisburg, for three years.

He was the head of the Allentown Economic Development Corp. Since 1992, he has been teaching a Franklin & Marshall College city government class, where the first word out of his mouth is "regionalism," he said.

It is his experience with city government that has led him to realize that regional planning impacts cities in a big way, he said.

"A lack of regional planning and regional decision-making impacts (cities) adversely," he said.

About two years ago, the Lancaster County Planning Commission asked him to help chair its effort to create an economic development plan for the city, he said. The plan likely will include principals of regionalism, including recommendations for the consolidation of municipal services, he said.

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Steven Hovis

*partner at Stock and Leader
York County*

Representing municipalities for nearly two decades has given Steven Hovis a clear vision of how regional efforts such as collective purchasing and police department consolidation can benefit municipalities.

Hovis is a partner and chairman of the municipal law group at York-based law firm [Stock And Leader](#).

Through his employment, he was hired to oversee the implementation of a charter agreement between Springettsbury and Spring Garden townships that would create a merged fire department. The department began operating as York Area United Fire and Rescue in 2008, he said.

Hovis also has stepped up to chair [YorkCounts](#)' public safety study committee, which began meeting this year with representatives from nine York County municipalities to determine whether the creation of a regional police force would provide more effective safety services.

Hovis also has helped to create the Southwestern Regional Police Department, which represents five York County municipalities, and the York Area Regional Police Department, which includes Windsor and York townships.

"Over time, municipalities start to see how other communities have partnered together and the benefits they have seen," he said.

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Alex Hartzler

*president of WCI Partners
Dauphin County*

Alex Hartzler often can be found acting as a cheerleader for regionalism in the Cumberland and Dauphin county areas.

Hartzler is president of Harrisburg-based [WCI Partners](#) and was the founding president of Harrisburg Young Professionals.

He said he has spent many years encouraging the Harrisburg Regional Chamber and the West Shore Chamber to consolidate.

"Until we dispense with the foolishness in the business community, I don't see how we're ever going to impress upon politicians (the importance of getting) the police chiefs to work together," he said.

For the past several years, he has been invited to give lectures on regionalism to [Leadership Harrisburg Area](#) classes.

"I'm passionate about it because I think it affects our quality of life in Central Pennsylvania," Hartzler said. "The way we're structured on a local government level kills jobs, halts development and makes our cities weaker."