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One for all: Two become one

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If you've read this far, you might doubt that the midstate is a bastion of regionalism.

It's still home to hundreds of police departments, fire departments, municipalities and school districts -- and plenty of folks like it that way.

Nevertheless, municipal cooperation and consolidation has appeared in the area.

The Central Penn Business Journal spoke with a few representatives to see how they work.

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West Shore Regional Police Department

Parties involved: The police departments of Lemoyne and Wormleysburg.

Founded: 1995.

The scoop: [The West Shore Regional Police Department](#) was roughly 20 years in the making.

The state commissioned a study in the early 1970s and again in the 1980s to weigh the feasibility of police department consolidations in Cumberland County, said Howard Dougherty a former police chief and borough manager for Lemoyne.

The studies failed to inspire other municipalities, but were enough to get the boroughs of Lemoyne and Wormleysburg talking in 1990, he said.

The two formed an intergovernmental cooperation committee that met regularly to discuss a merger, eventually signing the agreement that formed the department in 1995.

The department's governing body contains representatives from the municipalities it serves. Dougherty said he estimated the merger saves Wormleysburg about \$300,000 per year and saves Lemoyne \$400,000 to \$500,000.

"A lot of people are very leery of consolidation," he said. "If they look at it and they study it, it works. They have to take their personal feelings out of it."

West Shore wasn't the first regional police department in the midstate, and similar entities exist in Lancaster and York counties.

"There's a lot of them, and we're going to see more and more because money's going to demand it," Dougherty said. "The municipalities just don't have the money."

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York Area United Fire and Rescue

Parties involved: The fire departments of Springettsbury and Spring Garden townships.

Founded: 2007.

The scoop: When compiling its budget for 2010, the staff of [York Area United Fire And Rescue](#) had to make some welcome adjustments.

The department -- Pennsylvania's first consolidation that involves both paid and volunteer firefighters -- will need about 1 percent less money in 2010 than originally expected.

"We feel we are definitely on the right track," Chief Robert McCoy said.

The process to create YAUFRR began in 2002, spurred by both departments' increasing difficulty at finding volunteers.

Now rounding out its second year, YAUFRR is a work in progress. Contractual issues among paid firefighter contracts still are being hammered out, and the two departments' charitable arms are being combined, McCoy said.

One of the reports commissioned to examine the merger estimated that it will save \$1.3 million over a 20-year period in equipment/maintenance costs, plus a possible one-time boost of \$60,000 from the resale of redundant equipment.

Savings from the merger won't all occur immediately, but combined purchasing and different policies with vendors already are starting to help, McCoy said.

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Lancaster Inter-Municipal Committee

Parties involved: 13 municipalities, primarily in central Lancaster County and including Lancaster city, encompassing about 40 percent of the county's population.

Founded: 1960s.

The scoop: A Lancastrian set down in Columbia Borough wouldn't likely mistake it for West Hempfield Township, or vice versa. But the two somewhat dissimilar municipalities do have something in common: membership in the Lancaster Inter-Municipal Committee.

The committee is "a coordinating and recommending organization," that has its roots in informal meetings among municipalities, said Executive Director John Ahlfeld.

The committee is now working to draft a tattoo and body modification ordinance, using the expertise of committee members whose municipalities already have a good handle on how to regulate businesses involved in those procedures.

After the ordinance is written, municipalities in the committee can choose whether to adopt it. This saves local governments time and money and can save businesses with a presence in more than once municipality money as well, Ahlfeld said.

Other initiatives the committee has worked on include creating a sign ordinance adopted by many of the municipalities and establishing the same trick-or-treat night for children across the area.

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East Pennsboro Township

Parties involved: East Pennsboro Township merged with West Fairview Borough.

Founded: The merger occurred in 1998.

The scoop: The way the merger between East Pennsboro Township and West Fairview Borough began also is one of the main reasons it succeeded, Robert Gill said.

"It worked because the people started it," said Gill, the East Pennsboro Township manager since 1983. "It wasn't forced upon them."

The roughly 3-acre West Fairview Borough government came to East Pennsboro asking for the merger, riding a groundswell of public support, Gill said. So the two entities collaborated on a study hashing out how a combination would work.

And a critical third party came to the table: The state offered \$750,000 over five years to shore up West Fairview's aging infrastructure, including improvements to sewer lines and road resurfacing, Gill said. Without this

contribution, he said, the merger wouldn't have been possible.

Voters in both municipalities in 1997 overwhelmingly approved a referendum for the combination, he said. All functions performed by West Fairview were transferred to East Pennsboro, and the borough's council members were invited to serve on governing committees for the township.

Gill said he'd like to see more mergers like it but is doubtful that's going to happen.

"There are over 2,600 municipalities in Pennsylvania. We have way too many, and I believe there should be more consolidation," he said. "Unfortunately, a lot of people -- elected officials -- don't want to give up their power."

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York Adams Regional Smart Growth Committee

Parties involved: 25-30 people including Realtors, engineers, municipal officials and representatives from the [York County Economic Development Corp.](#)

Founded: Informally founded in 2007, bylaws adopted in 2009.

The scoop: Midstate municipal planners have a job to do, but the members of the York Adams Regional Smart Growth Committee believe it's not one they can do alone.

"We realize our community is growing, and how we grow in the future is up to us," said Shanna Wiest, the coalition's coordinator and government affairs director at the [Realtors Association Of York And Adams Counties](#).

"It can't just be left to (municipal) planning staff to make those decisions. They need input so they can make informed decisions," she said.

The committee advocates for smart-growth strategies and holds seminars and quarterly forums on growth-related issues such as transportation.

What sets the committee apart is that it includes -- and is led by -- representatives from the business community, she said. That doesn't always happen with planning efforts.

"York and Adams counties are facing a lot of the same issues, and it's helpful for us to work together," Wiest said.

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YorkCounts

Parties involved: Coalition partners include [Better York](#), the [United Way Of York County](#), [WellSpan Health](#), [York College Of Pennsylvania](#), York County, the [York County Chamber Of Commerce](#), the [York County Community Foundation](#) and the York County Economic Development Corporation.

Founded: The York County commissioners established the YorkCounts commission in 2002 to create a community action plan.

The scoop: Any discussion of regionalism in York County likely includes a mention of [YorkCounts](#).

The coalition brings multiple parties to the table -- including businesses, planners, schools, nonprofits and government -- to pave the way for cooperation and a regional mindset.

For example, YorkCounts is working with nine municipalities in the county including York city, trying to facilitate the creation of a Metro York Regional Police Department.

YorkCounts also collaborated with the York County Economic Development Corp. to establish a countywide work force development training system that aims to pair businesses with the qualified workers they need.

"In York County, and Pennsylvania in general, the government structure is very fragmented. Historically, there's not a lot of cooperation in terms of land-use planning, economic development strategies and establishing coordination in creating growth areas," spokesman Dan Fink said.

"That becomes a quality-of-life issue from YorkCounts' perspective."

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Southeastern Pennsylvania Counties Purchasing Board

Parties involved: Nine Pennsylvania county governments, including Lancaster and York counties.

Founded: mid-1980s.

The scoop: What difference does it make to the residents of Lancaster County if Chester County chooses to purchase a truckload of copier paper?

It can make plenty, thanks to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Counties Purchasing Board.

The group allows counties to go in together on a bid for supplies such as toilet paper or pens, granting them access to economies of scale.

Counties also share the cost of putting together a bid -- about \$1,000 -- and trade off which staff must take the time to assemble it, said Barry Hitchcock, Lancaster County's director of purchasing.

The co-op interfaces with one limited to Lancaster County government entities.

"Some small municipality may only use two or three cases of paper, but they're getting the price benefit for buying an equivalent of 80,000 reams of paper," Hitchcock said.

Members of the countywide co-op also work together on bids, one of which saved municipalities a total of about \$500,000 per year on rock salt, he said.

Various forms of cooperative purchasing in 2007 saved Lancaster County about 16 percent, he said.

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Pa. provides assistance, grants to encourage regionalism

Municipal entities contemplating cooperation or consolidation don't have to go it alone.

The [Governor's Center For Local Government Services](#), a part of the state Department of Community & Economic Development, can help smooth the way.

The Center's Web site contains guides on how best to undertake many forms of intergovernmental cooperation, from joint police forces to multi-municipal land-use plans.

At the next level, the center provides free training and technical assistance to entities contemplating cooperation.

The center is working on 13 regional feasibility studies with Pennsylvania police departments and expects the formation of four new regional police departments next year, said Jamie Yates, deputy press secretary at DCED.

Four management studies on the feasibility of regional fire departments are ongoing and 10 pending, she said.

"Forty-nine groups representing 126 municipalities and 149 Fire and EMS organizations in 24 counties have preliminary or formal committees pursuing consolidations, mergers or regional fire/EMS commissions since July 1, 2008," she wrote in an e-mail.

Besides that, more than 40 organizations are working on 20 efforts at cooperation or consolidation and haven't requested assistance, she said.

In general, the "three Cs" -- creativity, cooperation and commitment -- are a good guide to what makes a successful effort, said Fred Reddig, executive director of the center.

The center also provides matching grants to ease the process. A total of 22 multi-municipality planning efforts and 48 shared municipal services efforts received such grants in 2008, totaling \$2.4 million, according to Yates.

Available funds for these grants for fiscal year 2009-10 has been trimmed back to \$500,000 because of the state's budget woes and the resources needed to consolidate the state's earned-income tax collection system, Reddig said.

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