



YORK AREA

YorkCounts: Police merger study could be completed this year

Nine municipalities exploring possibility of a joint police force.

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Nine York County municipalities have shown "a lot of political courage" by participating in YorkCounts' planned study of police regionalization, an attorney representing the group said Friday.

For more than a year, YorkCounts has been working with local governments interested in the benefits of consolidating their police departments, including possible cost savings and improvements in response time.

Signing on to a study that could recommend "the reconfiguration or even elimination of their local police departments" was a bold move, said Steve Hovis, an attorney with York law firm Stock & Leader, at YorkCounts' annual summit Friday.

"York County will be greatly benefited by the willingness of these nine municipalities to look beyond their immediate political interests and consider the greater long-term goal and good," he said.

Onboard: The municipalities participating in the study are York City; Dover, Manchester, East Manchester, Spring Garden and Springettsbury townships; and West York, Manchester and Mount Wolf boroughs. Four municipal and two regional police departments currently cover those areas.

The timing of the study, which likely will be carried out by the Washington, D.C.-based Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), depends on how quickly funding can be put together. Hovis said YorkCounts is pursuing a number of funding sources, including grants.

But even with the money still waiting, the organization is confident that the

study can be mounted and completed this year, he said.

YorkCounts initially approached 21 municipalities in the York metro area about participating in the study, director James DeBord said. Some entities, like the Northeastern Regional Police Department, expressed interest in the concept even before they were approached formally. Others preemptively told YorkCounts that they were not interested.

Getting this far "certainly has not been something that's come easily," DeBord said.

Factors: Craig Fraser, director of management services for PERF, outlined the parameters of the study at the summit Friday.

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The project first would seek to answer several questions specific to the area, including whether a merged department would work better for York County, how much a merger would cost and how it would be funded.

The study also would factor in the staffing of each police unit, personnel and overtime expenses, any cost-sharing possibilities and how to deal with existing departments' pension plans, among many other variables.

Pennsylvania's legislative framework makes it difficult for municipalities to even consider police mergers, but the option should be considered, Hovis said.

"Efforts to combat crime cannot and shall not stop at municipal borders," he said.

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