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Residents Debate Pros and Cons of Consolidation

Potential savings, form of government, new police structure were all discussed at the Saturday morning event at Princeton Public Library.

By [Dan Pazos](#) [Email the author](#) October 3, 2011

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Residents packed the Community Room at Princeton Public Library on Saturday morning to discuss the proposed consolidation between Princeton Borough and Princeton Township.

Close to 100 people listened as members of the Consolidation and Shared Services Study Commission and the state Center for Government Research outlined the commission's findings and recommendation to merge into one combined entity, called Princeton.

Residents also had an opportunity to ask questions.

On Nov. 8, voters will be asked to approve consolidation of the two Princetons. Voters in both municipalities must approve the measure in order to move forward.

Borough Councilor David Goldfarb and Township Committeeman Bernie Miller, both members of the consolidation commission, outlined the commission's recommendation to consolidate into a borough municipality.

Later, Goldfarb moved into the audience and questioned Township Mayor Chad Goerner's estimate that consolidation would save \$3.2 million a year in annual savings, mostly through salary and wage reductions.

Goldfarb said he believes the savings would only be about \$1.2 million.

When the commission voted to recommend consolidation to the voters, Goldfarb was the lone commission member to vote against it, saying he felt that the commission had become an advocacy group for consolidation.

Also questioning the commission's findings on Saturday was Kate Warren, founder of "Preserve our Historic Borough," an organization that opposes consolidation.

"Where is the cost analysis," Warren asked. "There is no cost analysis in the report."

Audience member Joshua Zinder questioned why the commission failed recommend a ward system of governance, with elected neighborhood representatives.

Lack of representation has been sticking point with some borough residents who feel that their voice may be ignored upon a merger with the township, which has roughly double the borough's population.

Saturday's event was co-sponsored by Princeton Future, the League of Women Voters of the Princeton Area and Princeton Public Library.

Goerner noted Gov. Chris Christie's announcement on Friday that the state would provide grants totaling 20 percent of one-time consolidation costs.

"We planned for nothing and this is better than nothing," Goerner said. He said if the borough and township remain separate entities, it would be difficult to find savings to rival those possible through consolidation.

"Under consolidation we would share benefits and financial impacts," Goerner said.

One of the largest financial savings, an estimated \$1.2 million annually, would come from merging the borough and township police departments and reducing staff from 60 sworn officers to 51 over three years through a restructuring of higher-ranked officers.

"The police are very supportive of one police department under one governing body," Commission Member William Metro said in response to a resident's question.

Saving money may be a benefit of consolidation, but some residents question if estimated savings have been realized when other communities consolidated.

Patrick Simon, a borough resident and consolidation commission member said the commission's work was solid.

"If there is no evidence to support consolidation, you shouldn't do it," Simon said. "It works here because we have a path forward with evidence that says we can do it."

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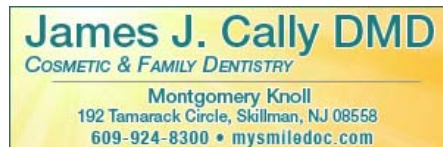


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