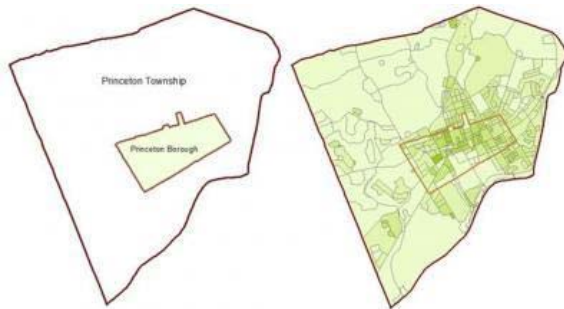


[Home](#)

Preparing for a Year of Transition

ARTICLE | NOVEMBER 25, 2011 - 8:08AM | BY ANGELA WU



The Princetons are now accepting applications (until Dec. 7) for a transition team with a historic mission: consolidating the borough and township into a merged government that

will take over on January 1, 2013.

“2012 will be essentially a transition year,” said Joe Stefko, director of public finance at the [Center for Governmental Research](#), the non-profit consulting firm commissioned to work with the Joint Shared Services Consolidation Commission (JSSCC). “And there is certainly a lot of work to be done.”

The 12-member transition team, composed of two elected officials from each municipality and four citizen representatives (one an alternate), will work with township administrator Jim Pascale and borough administrator Bob Bruschi, as well as subcommittees of citizens with specialized expertise. The JSSCC will continue to serve in an advisory role.

The next year will be focused on resolving differences in everything from computer systems to office culture in the two municipalities. According to the JSSCC, these efforts will bring about an average individual savings of \$591 for residents of the borough and \$416 for residents of the township.

The most significant change will be, of course, to the municipal governments, which includes both elected officials and staff. Staffing arrangements will be an important—and delicate—issue in the coming year. Princeton’s new elected officials will be decided in an election next

November. The new mayor will be joined by a council of six residents of, as JSSCC chairman Anton Lahnston put it, “Princeton. Period. Not a township and a borough.”

At the JSSCC’s first post-vote meeting on Monday, several members also noted the possibility of working with the county to redraw district boundaries so that they may be “more harmonious to the neighborhoods that exist in a consolidated Princeton,” Lahnston said. Currently, several neighborhoods, including the Princeton University campus, are split between the township and borough.

“This is an opportunity to take a look at how we can unite neighborhoods through the redistricting process,” Township mayor Chad Goerner said on Monday.

Stefko said that certain issues, like dealing with specific service providers to the consolidated community, might be resolved only after the borough and township come together. In the mean time, the transition team will grapple with issues that range from merging office space to managing elections.

The consolidation of the public works and police departments will require careful consideration. Police services currently make up the largest component of each town’s budget. The transition team will also consider certain services that are already shared—like the school board, which will no longer be a regional board, shared between the two towns, but a Princeton school board, Lahnston said.

The task ahead ahead is formidable, but after decades of considering a union, the borough and township should have an easier go of consolidation than others. The Princetons’ record of shared services demonstrates a willingness to work together, Stefko said.

“The reality is that they have already moved to consolidate or share services more than pretty much any other pair of municipal neighbors that I’ve seen in all my years of doing this,” he said.

Both municipalities have been preparing for the change, said Princeton borough council member Jo Butler, in some cases delaying purchases that may be redundant post-consolidation.

“In some ways, the nice thing is that we’ve got a bit of a running start on

this,” she said. “Nobody thought this was a foregone conclusion, but we were very mindful that it would be a real possibility. We didn’t want to spend money that we didn’t have to.”

Though many characteristics make Princeton’s situation unique, this next year’s work could offer a model for future consolidation efforts. That also means extra consideration on the part of the transition team.

“We’ll create the answers and the structures and processes as we go along, but there’s a lot of new ground here,” Lahnston said.

One potential recommendation has already surfaced: extensive community involvement. In Monday’s meeting, Stefko said that he had seen a greater emphasis on public engagement in Princeton’s consolidation efforts than in any other community he had worked with previously.

“The members of the commission contributed time to ensuring from the very beginning that this was a community dialogue, not just a one-way transfer of information to residents,” he said. He added that he expected engagement with residents to be of high priority in the transition process, as well.

For their part, residents voted strongly in favor of consolidation, with the measure to consolidate passing by 61 percent in the borough and 85 percent in the township. One reason may have been the economic downturn and the fact that the two municipalities currently hold a similar amount of debt, some suggested in Monday’s meeting.

“I think everyone was really more financially attuned to the cost of government,” said JSSCC member Bill Metro. “There was something in the minds of voters that wasn’t there last time.”

“People are grasping at straws to reduce their tax bill,” said Burton Mitchell, a long-time resident of the borough, last week. Mitchell, one of 891 who voted against consolidation in the borough, said he was concerned about the many details, like trash collection or even streetlights, which might affect residents after consolidation. His reservations reflect the considerable task the transition team will face next year in addressing every detail of combining two similar—but still separate—towns.

“I’m not philosophically opposed to it,” he said. “It’s just that there are

things people don't think about.”

About the Author »




Angela Wu

Angela Wu '12 is a student at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School. Her work has appeared in publications including Newsweek, Marie Claire and the Newark Star-Ledger, and she is a columnist for the Princeton Alumni Weekly.

RELATED TERMS: Consolidation Township JSSCC Princeton University campus finance Administrator Anton Lahnston Bob Bruschi Burton Mitchell Chad Goerner Chairman Collection director Jim Pascale Joe Stefko mayor Princeton University University of Oxford

Google Videos Like This »



powered by 

[Anton Lahnston](#) [Collection](#) [Joe Stefko](#) [Princeton University](#)
[University of Oxford](#)

[LATEST NEWS](#) | [TOWN TALK](#) | [RESOURCES](#) | [EVENTS](#) | 

[Advertise](#) [About Us](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

Powered by [Phase2 Technology](#)