



Princeton Borough, Township approve question to merge towns

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By **Megan DeMarco/Statehouse Bureau**

MERCER COUNTY — In the effort to merge the two Princetons, the fourth time's the charm.

Princeton Borough and Princeton Township will combine, marking the first time New Jersey will lose a municipality since 1997.

With voter approval from both Princetons needed, the merger was easily approved today in the township, 3,542 to 604, and by a tighter margin — 1,238 to 828 — in the borough.

The result was historic because voters in a state that has long cherished "home rule" have regularly rejected efforts to consolidate — including three failed attempts in the Princetons since 1953.

Supporters of merging towns and sharing services, including Gov. Chris Christie, say such consolidations could bring down property taxes across the state.

"Princeton decided it wanted to be a leader tonight," said Princeton Township Mayor Chad Goerner. "Reason over fear won out when it came to the polls."

Goerner said he believes the Princetons "laid out the template" for other towns that may want to merge. The Princetons are one of 22 New Jersey "doughnut towns" where one town completely surrounds another. The state currently has 566 municipalities.

Opponents of the merger were mostly borough residents who worried their voices would be drowned out on the new town council, since there are more township residents than borough residents. There was also concern the cost of combining the towns — buying out employees, and merging laws and ordinances — would be greater than expected.

The two towns already share 13 services. Proponents said combining the two governments and budgets would eventually save the Princetons about \$3.2 million a year.



Jody Somers/For The Star-Ledger

A sign on the border of Princeton Township, NJ and Princeton Borough, NJ on Harrison Street simply reads "Welcome to Princeton." A vote to consolidate the Township and Borough is scheduled for today.

The new town will be called simply "Princeton." A panel will spend the next year hashing out the details of merger. Next November, residents will elect new leaders, and the government will likely start functioning in January 2013, said Joe Sifko, director of public finance at the Center for Governmental Research, which helped the towns study consolidation. "The real difficult work to transition to a merged government would begin now," he said.

The last time New Jersey lost a town was in 1997, when the seven residents of Pahaquarry Township were folded into Hardwick in Warren County. Princeton Township dates to 1838, while the borough was established in 1894.

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Ledger Live for Tuesday April 26th, 2011 - Ledger Live with Brian Donohue. On today's show: On this edition of New Jersey Towns that Shouldn't Exist, we take a look at the "doughnut town" or the town within a town, Chester Borough and Chester Township.

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