

Minutes of the Spring Garden Township Board of Commissioners Business Meeting  
6:30 p.m. – September 16, 2024  
At Victory Fire Co. – 421 Wheaton Street, York, PA 17403

Persons Present:

**Commissioners:**

Daniel E. Rooney, President Commissioner  
David Detwiler, Vice President Commissioner  
Thomas Gwilt, Commissioner  
Anne Gray, Commissioner  
Andrew Herrold, Commissioner

**Township Administration:**

Township Administration (Luther C Wike Jr)  
Police (Acting Chief Adam Zimmerman)

**Township Consultants and Contracted Services:**

Solicitor (Attorney Walter Tilley, Stock and Leader)  
Finance (Krista Gardner/SEK, CFO)

**Meeting Guests:**

York County Regional Police Dept. (Chief Timothy Damon)  
PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development (Chief Gerald Simpson)  
PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development (Frederick Chapman)

**28 members of the public in attendance**

**I. Commence Meeting**

**A. Introductions and Background**

1. President Commissioner Rooney opened the meeting with introductions of those present and how the retirement of Chief Geroge Swartz (Ret.) prompted the decision to do the study on the viability of the township's police department.

**B. DCED Presentation**

1. Part 1 – Presented by President Commissioner Rooney
  - i) Metro York Consortium Slide: Discussed the drop in applicants. The decline is a national trend and maintaining the level of officers needed to run the force is of concern in the future. There are also the financial aspects of the lack of applicants and retaining current officers.
  - ii) Challenges Slide: Read through the notes on the slide and stressed the issue with recruitment.
  - iii) Recruitment Slide: Discussed limitations due to the Civil Service Commission restrictions as well as Act 120 certification. Reviewed the issues with candidate selection regarding scoring versus fit for organization. Acknowledged that there is also Veterans Preference Act which can also impact the selection process. Discussed the eligibility list time factors.
  - iv) Per Capita Slide: Pointed out Spring Garden had the highest Per Capita in 2023 (\$308) from the listed local comparisons. Cost factors will likely continue to increase.
2. Part 2 – Presented by (Former) Chief Gerald Simpson from DCED
  - i) Chief Simpson gave a brief introduction about his 40 years of service and his background relating to stability of police forces. He touched on the main points of his portion of the presentation including the options available with regionalization and the benchmarks used from municipal statistics.
  - ii) Mission Statement Slide: Reviewed the mission statement and points on sustainability as it related to the mission statement. The business model is public safety, and that the merger should be considered from a business angle with the purpose of public safety.
  - iii) Process Slide: Touched on notes in slides, including direction to the website to view the slides later for more information. Discussed the thresholds where taxpayers are more comfortable with the cost/benefit of their tax dollars being spent on policing. Cited previously it was 33-40% but has shifted towards 1/3 or even 25-30%.
  - iv) Per Capita Slide & Personal Cost: Reviewed that the percentage of the budget is 44% for policing which is projected to increase.
  - v) Average Cost Slide: Discussed the staffing needs to serve the community and how it relates to the overall cost per officer.

- vi) Recommendation Slide: Discussed the need to ask the hard questions regarding a merger. Is the merger going to be more challenging than maintaining a police force? Sustainability is not a short-term question, but a long-term question. Consideration that the market is labor driven and will continue to impact the previously mentioned factors.
- vii) Additional Option Slide: Reviewed the options other than a merger; including raising taxes, dissolving the force and relying on Pennsylvania State Police, reduction or hybrid model where a portion is covered by Pennsylvania State Police (ex 2am-6am), or contracted options.

### **C. Financial Analysis**

#### **1. Part 3 – Presented by Krista Gardner**

- i) Potential Savings Slide: reviewed the 2025 and 2026 budget projections and advised that those numbers were used to calculate potential savings. The calculations were based on the need for 16 officers with regionalization.
- ii) Other Considerations Slide: Discussed the considerations regarding the use of the current building, pension, healthcare, parking enforcement and lost revenue streams if regionalized.

#### **2. Part 4 – Presented by President Commissioner Rooney**

- i) Merger Process Slide: reviewed the triad of agreements that would need to occur for a successful merger. Noted that the Township is still waiting on additional reports regarding the pension plan. Touched again on the recruitment challenges, including possibility of having to offer sign-on bonuses to increase recruitment and therefore increase costs further.

### **D. York County Regional Police Department (YCRPD), Chief Timothy Damon**

- 1. Remarked about the process now, and that he reviewed the news and information available from the attempt to merge that was made 25 years ago.
- 2. Remarked on the costs of recruitment, training, and new technology and without those, forces can become stagnant. Used the example of body cameras being something residents have come to expect, and they require training, upgrades, and maintenance to maintain.
- 3. Remarked on the economies of scale and how just like a business regional forces can use the economies of scale to be more efficient in their operations.
- 4. Remarked about the new requirements for schools to have resource officers which requires additional training and opportunities for additional officers on force to build trust with the younger generation.
- 5. Touched on the current makeup of the regional department (municipalities, number of square miles, and number of residents)

### **E. Spring Garden Police Department, Acting Chief Adam Zimmerman**

- 1. Remarked on current relationship with YCR, that both have same accreditations and similar policy/standards, and their methods of policing are similar.
- 2. Remarked that police would be the last of Spring Garden's emergency services to regionalize.

### **F. Public Comment**

- 1. **Teresa Jajich of 1501 First Ave;** asked where residents should go to get stop signs enforced (specifically the one at Ogontz and First Ave). Chief Zimmerman said that traffic enforcement is running short, but complaints should be made to the safety coordinator so that they know where to concentrate efforts to tamp down on issues. Chief Damon said it is a quality-of-life issue and that Regional had three to four officers pre-covid that handled traffic enforcement with a 50/50 approach for warning and citations to curb traffic infractions. Andy Herrold said to come to regular BOC meetings since there is usually at least one police representative there so they can be kept apprised of ongoing issues. Anne Gray said to communicate with their commissioners because there may be other solutions that could be done or could work with public works.
- 2. **Teresa Jajich of 1501 First Ave;** followed up to ask about what can be done about the large trucks around Elmwood that ignore the signage. Commissioner Rooney said it might be related to GPS

redirecting them. Teresa said it is also a lot of local trucks like Kinsley. Commissioner Rooney said to try to get the information to pass along and they can get in touch with the companies in question to remind their drivers of the restrictions.

3. **Dave Morgalis of 764 Greendale Rd;** asked how long it would take to complete the merger if it is decided to do so. Commissioner Herrold said it can take months depending on negotiations. Commissioner Gray said that it would likely be early next year. President Commissioner Rooney said that they are still waiting on additional data about pensions but would say three to six months would be a comfortable timeline.
4. **Sharon Farr of 361 Elmwood Blvd;** stated she was concerned about the cost and how much it could impact the taxes (and cited school taxes). Commissioner Gray acknowledged the potential impact to taxes the decision on the merger could have. Commissioner Rooney said they are aware of the issues with the school board and suggested to continue to go to the school board meeting to voice their concerns about the school taxes.
5. **Walter R. Groom of 110 N Strathcona Dr;** stated he thought it was a good idea to merge 25 years ago; and thinks it is a great idea now to merge. He thinks it will increase the level of services and that Spring Garden PD as a standalone force may not be able to continue to provide the level of service residents expect. Commissioner Detwiler commented that Mr. Groom was Chief of the department for six years.
6. **Brian Latsha of 1604 Third Ave;** inquired about what data is available about the current response times and the potential impact a merger would have, and if there would be more meetings like this. Chief Damon said that residents could expect a similar response time as the merger wouldn't remove officers from the area and they would have similar levels of coverage, if not more. President Commissioner Rooney said that there might not be additional meetings, but residents are welcome to attend the Board of Commissioners workshops before meetings or the Board of Commissioners meetings to be kept up to date on the progress.
7. **George Stone III of 732 Greendale Rd;** Stated he was a lifelong resident of the Township, retired from the force in 2022 and supports the merger. He thinks that it is expensive to sustain a police force, and that the merger will allow the Township to avoid the trouble.
8. **William Fetrow of 1495 Bonbar Rd;** Inquired about the call volume difference between Spring Garden PD and Regional PD. Chief Zimmerman said that he did not have exact numbers but would say ballpark would be 7,600 calls for service. Chief Damon also did not have exact numbers but would say the ballpark would be 30,000 calls for service.
9. **Teresa Jajich of 1501 First Ave;** Asked why the merger did not happen the first time. Walter Groom said that the Township couldn't come to an agreement on the finance aspect of the merger.
10. **Brian Latsha of 1604 Third Ave;** Asked what the point of no return would be on a merger. Solicitor Tilly said that once it was passed by Ordinance it would be the point of no return. Commissioner Gray said that the parts of the merger would be worked through but not signed on. There is already a regional force to join and there is not as much under debate as the last attempt.
11. **Walter R. Groom of 110 Strathcona Dr;** asked if being a First-Class Township comes into the equation. President Commissioner Rooney said that it does not. Commissioner Detwiler said he believes the merger is the right thing to do. It will allow for more resources and advancement while still utilizing the current building.
12. **Teresa Jajich of 1501 First Ave;** asked how the public can show support for the merger. President Commissioner Rooney said to visit the website and submit comments of support or questions.
13. **Commissioner Gwilt** remarked on the previous Chief Sam Baublitz's approach to policing and that the Township has a great police force and that the merger is the best thing to do for it to stay great.

**14. Commissioner** Gray remarked that the merger would bring cost savings to the Township as recruiting officers and a new police chief are costly. Encouraged residents to download Savvy Citizen for updates. She shared her hope that the Township could bring back participation in National Night Out and that the fire department needs more volunteers.

II. Meeting Concluded.

Respectfully submitted,

Luther C Wike Jr.  
Acting Township Manager/Secretary

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Approved