

Minutes of the Spring Garden Township Board of Commissioners Business Meeting
6:30 p.m. – September 18, 2024
Indian Rock Elementary – 1500 Indian Rock Dam Rd, 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 (Frederick Chapman)

40 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 applications. The decline is a national trend and maintaining the level of coverage needed to run the force is of concern.
 - ii) Challenges Slide: Read through the slide and stressed the issue with finding candidates.
 - iii) Recruitment Slide: Discussed limitations due to the Civil Service Commission restrictions as a First-Class Township and due to Act 120 certification. Reviewed the issues with candidate selection regarding scoring versus fit for organization.
 - iv) Per Capita Slide: Pointed out Spring Garden had the highest Per Capita in 2023 (\$308) from the listed local comparisons.
2. Part 2 – Presented by President Commissioner Rooney
 - i) Mission Statement Slide: Reviewed the mission statement and points on sustainability as it related to the mission statement. Encouraged residents to go to the police merger website and view the information available there.
 - ii) Process Slide: Touched on notes in slides briefly.
 - iii) Per Cap Slide & Personal Cost: Reviewed the police budget percentages and discussed Spring Garden Police Department being the highest in the county.
 - iv) Average Cost Slide: Discussed the point that the police budget is 55-60% of the Townships total budget.
 - v) Recommendation Slide: Discussed the need to ask what the best way for the Township would be to maintain the current level of service. Discussed the need to look beyond the short-term needs and consider 20 plus years down the road.
 - vi) Additional Option Slide: Reviewed 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, 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.
 - ii) Chief Damon also added general comments about the meaning of the three points listed on the merger process slide.
- D. York County Regional Police Department (YCRPD), Chief Timothy Damon**
- 1. Remarked about the study and wanting to expand from the discussion on Monday.
 - 2. Remarked on the costs of recruitment, training, and new technology and without those, forces can become stagnant.
 - 3. Discussed the impact of technology on the department. Cited that York County Regional has a Digital Forensics Detective which allows them to expedite turn around on examining phones and computers to be entered into evidence. He mentioned that departments without an officer or the technology they need to do the work they must send the items to either the District Attorney's office downtown or if it is a computer the State Police. He pointed out that having to send the evidence to those outside agencies results in delays that can range from a few weeks to a few years depending on the case load for those agencies.
 - 4. Discussed the department's K-9 unit capabilities as well as intended training and additional units that are planned and their uses.
 - 5. Remarked that their department currently has 62 officers and 6 civilian staff and that they have better capabilities to back-fill because they do lateral recruitment.
 - 6. Remarked about the new requirements for schools to have resource officers which requires additional training and opportunities for additional officers on the force to build trust with the younger generation.
- E. Spring Garden Police Department, Acting Chief Adam Zimmerman**
- 1. Remarked on current relationship with YCR, that both have same the accreditations and similar policy/standards, and their methods of policing are similar.
 - 2. Remarked that the lack of applicants is concerning. Cited that there were zero applicants during the last round of applications and currently the department is facing the prospect of up to seven officers retiring within the next 11 months, including 4 Sergeants and a Chief. There is the concern that replacing the older officers will result in loss of institutional knowledge.
 - 3. Remarked that the police department would be the last of Spring Garden's emergency services to regionalize.
- F. Public Comment**
- 1. **Fredrick Champman from DCED** thanked residents for coming out and that DCED is there to support either decision that is made. He also said that if they have any questions to visit the DCED website and reach out to him.
 - 2. **Edie Turnball of 340 Lambeth Walk**; Inquired about the diversity of both departments and the potential for an explosive K-9 unit. Chief Zimmerman said the department is all Caucasian with two female officers. Chief Damon said they have five female officers and three minorities.
 - 3. **Katie Horn of 835 S Albemarle St**; Asked if the departments were to merge, would residents maintain the same number of officers generally available. Chief Damon said that the same number of officers would be available, but there would likely be more available due to the proximity of the patrol zones.

4. **Penelope Wood of 1413 First Ave;** Asked for clarification on any delay in dispatch with a merger. Chief Damon said that Regional already hears the calls come through from dispatch and have a general idea of what zones cars would be in. They would also have additional cars in closer proximity giving them more options if multiple officers are on calls.
5. **Penelope Wood of 1413 First Ave;** Asked if the patrol that she often sees would change with a merger. Chief Damon said that the officers know the area and know where to concentrate patrols and a merger wouldn't change, officers will patrol based on needs.
6. **Mike Darrah of 839 S Albemarle St;** Stated he is all for the merger if the department gets what they need. He said he understands that Regional requires wreck master training for tow companies, but there is no local training available until after the first of the year. Inquired if there would be a grace period to obtain the training. Chief Damon said that the purpose of the certification is to show that the tow companies know what they are doing, and to touch base with him later after he can investigate.
7. **Beth Ann Walp of 70 Elmwood Blvd;** Thanked the Commissioners for their transparency regarding the potential merger. Asked if the accreditations would transfer. Chief Zimmerman said that Regional was accredited prior to Spring Garden, so that would remain the same.
8. **Robert Elser of 1183 Wyndham Dr;** Stated he is in favor of the merger, but wanted to know how it will change the ability to recruit. Chief Damon said the candidates want to know that they have opportunities. In a regional department if one officer retires there is likely room for rank movement for multiple officers. Chief Zimmerman stated that when he was promoted in 2006 it was the first availability in the department for a promotion in 15 years. Commissioner Herrold said that without the restrictions of the Civil Service Commission requirements there is more flexibility.
9. **Friedel Liebe-Elser of 1183 Wyndham Dr;** Wanted to know how the merger will impact response time because she does not mind paying for security. President Commissioner Rooney said that it would be the same process just a different agency. Chief Zimmerman reiterated the point made by President Commissioner Rooney and added that the response time may even decrease due to the additional officer pool.
10. **Bernadette Whittaker of 106 Lisa Lane (Springettsbury);** Stated that with the current views on policing, officers go to schools regularly to build a positive association within the youth. Chief Damon said that most schools currently have a Student Resource Officer and that it is important for students to have positive interactions. He also noted that some of the recent students that tested mentioned positive experiences with School Resource Officers as a contributing factor to their decision to apply.
11. **Fredger Alexander of 1730 Wyndham Dr;** Stated he is trying to understand the training process in Pennsylvania as someone from California. Chief Zimmerman said that many other states use a three-agency model, including California. However, Pennsylvania has over 1,200 agencies with 83% having less than 10 officers.
12. **Calisha Owens of 444 W Springettsbury Ave;** Stated that she has seen other mergers, and not all of them were great. She requested additional information about the study. Commissioner Gray directed her to the website where the study is posted, and she could e-mail any questions about the study she may have.
13. **Calisha Owens of 444 W Springettsbury Ave;** Inquired about the impact of a merger on salaries. Commissioner Gray said that would be negotiated within the police association, but she is aware there would be changes to salary and benefits.
14. **John Porter of 144 Highland Rd;** Asked Krista Gardner if the unknown costs will be known by the Township and when will that information be available. Kirsta said that it would be part of negotiations and both departments are speaking with third parties to gather information regarding what the cost would be for pensions so that those items can be ironed out.

- 15. John Porter of 144 Highland Rd;** Asked Krista Gardner what would happen to the savings. Krista said that there are no current plans, but there is the new fire station and public works projects that are in the works that would need consideration for how those savings could offset the expenditures.
- 16. John Porter of 144 Highland Rd;** Asked Chief Damon what the next steps are and how long the process is in his experience. Chief Damon said that in a previous merger they had all the signatures in August and were operational by January 1. It can take a few months, but they understand the process and have a template to do it in that time frame.
- 17. Ann Luciani of 725 Glenwood Dr;** Stated she understands the recruiting difficulty and inquired if the same officers will be assigned to the area. Chief Damon said that residents will likely see some of the same officers but officers need to understand the entire coverage area so there would be some officer movement to different areas to allow officers to familiarize themselves with different zones. The variation should be no different than with consideration to officers retiring and having new officers. Commissioner Gray also added that the departments currently share a mental health responder so there is a familiarity with working together.
- 18. Kenya Brown Feeser of 422 W Jackson St;** Will the merger allow for more detectives to be available for investigations, and will there be a designated professional for recruiting? Chief Damon said that he has a few officers that he can put on tasks relating to recruiting even though they do not have a currently one. Regional currently has seven detectives.
- 19. Patricia Hufnagel of 1112 Greenleigh Dr;** Requested an explanation of the Civil Service Commission and if there was any consideration to contracting officers from other departments. Solicitor Tilly said that it is set by First Class Township code and Regional is more flexible because they are not restricted by the requirement of a First-Class Township to have a Civil Service Commission.
- 20. Ann Luciani of 725 Glenwood Dr;** Followed up to Patricia's inquiry and asked if that means that it is easier to get hired by York County Regional. Solicitor Tilly said that applicants apply to multiple departments and while Civil Service Commission requirements do not equate to quality determination it does limit the applicant pool and was set up to reduce favoritism in the hiring process.
- 21. Penelope Wood of 1413 First Ave;** Asked about the specific differences between Spring Garden salaries and Regional salaries because she is concerned about the possibility of a pay cut for the Spring Garden officers. President Commissioner Rooney and Commissioner Herrold said that Spring Garden salaries are higher, but Regional has better benefits. Chief Damon said that the Police Officers Association has worked through the details on the differences and the officers understand the differences and are agreeable to them.

II. Meeting Concluded.

Respectfully submitted,

Luther C Wike Jr.
Acting Township Manager/Secretary

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