



**FORUMS INSTITUTE**  
*For Public Policy*

## **A Report on the Union County Summit on Shared Services September 8, 2006**

### **The Union County Summit on Shared Services**

The County of Union through the Office of the County Manager contracted with the Forums Institute of Public Policy to facilitate a summit on shared services with the county's mayors and administrators. The half-day summit was conducted on Friday, September 8, 2006 at the Estabrook center on the Kean University campus. The cost of the summit was underwritten by a COUNT grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Service.

### **Purpose of the Summit**

The purpose of the summit was to facilitate an interactive dialogue with the county's mayors and administrators to identify areas of potential shared or regionalized service and to determine those services which should be given priority attention for shared service arrangements or for regionalization.

### **The Role of the Forums Institute of Public Policy**

The Forums Institute of Public Policy is a neutral convener that assists county and municipal governments with regional and shared services through the use of facilitation skills and techniques. Forum's work centers on its ability to bring people together to engage in the free exchange of information and ideas through facilitation.

Across the country, examples exist for effective meetings at the local level. All are based on principles of civil discourse and rely on preparation and procedures, usually handled by a facilitator.

A facilitator provides:

- A neutral convener - No matter how amicable, if Town A has called the meeting, Town A can be suspect in motivation. A facilitator acts as the bridge between and among the towns.

- An appropriate design - Because of skill and experience, a facilitator can suggest, design and execute activities and approaches that afford maximum participation.
- A safe harbor - Using and enforcing ground rules, the facilitator provides a place for all to participate on an equal footing with differing viewpoints honored.
- Opportunities for all to participate - The host does not have to play the two roles of chair and participant. A facilitator allows the host the opportunity to participate fully in the discussion.
- Logistic support – The facilitator manages the time and space to support the work of the group. In a series of meetings, the facilitator works between meetings to secure attendance, handle records, and gather additional information.
- Point of trust – The facilitator establishes a rapport with the participants, which allows all the issues to surface in the meeting as well as all of the controversy that is often held until afterwards in the parking lot.
- Success – The facilitator helps the group define success for themselves and works with them in the ways outlined above to achieve that success.

Accordingly, Forums, working with the Office of the County Manager designed, planned and facilitated a half day summit to develop a planned approach to the enhancement of shared and/or regional services between the county and its municipalities.

### **The Participants**

On July 11, 2006 the County Manager, George Devanney sent a letter to all the municipal Mayors and Administrators of Union County inviting them to the September 8, 2006 summit. This letter was followed by another on August 22. The following municipal and county officials participated in the summit:

#### Municipal Representatives

Robert Sherr, Health Officer, Town of Westfield  
 Anne Travisano, Nursing Supervisor, Town of Westfield  
 Ron Manzella, Assistant Township Administrator, Union Township  
 Angie Devanney, Township Administrator, Township of Berkeley Heights  
 Doug Marvin, Township Administrator, Township of New Providence  
 Carlton McGee, Administrator, City of Plainfield  
 W. Paul Kelley, Deputy Police Chief, City of Summit  
 Eleanor McGovern, Borough Administrator/Clerk, Borough of Fanwood  
 Doreen Cali, Borough Clerk, Borough of Roselle Park  
 Marlena Schmid, Township Administrator, Township of Cranford  
 Garrett Smith, Mayor, Borough of Roselle  
 Ed Fanning, Township Administrator, Township of Springfield

## County Representatives

Alexander Mirabella, Freeholder Director  
Chester Holmes, Freeholder  
Daniel Sullivan, Freeholder  
George Devanney, County Manager, County of Union  
Ryan Garner, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, County of Union  
Dan Bernier, Director of Parks Planning and Maintenance, County of Union  
Vic Vinegra, Consultant, harbor Consultants Inc.  
Joseph A. Graziano, Sr. Director, Public Works and Engineering, County of Union  
Dan Vaniska, Chief of Police, County of Union  
Michael M. Yuska, Director of Purchasing, County of Union  
Kathleen M. Villaggio, Bureau Chief, Data Processing and Telecommunications,  
Division of Information Technologies, County of Union  
Harold Gibson, Director of Public Safety, County of Union  
Ben Laganga, Director of Emergency Management, County of Union  
Al Faella, Director of Economic Development, County of Union

## **The Agenda for the Summit**

The agenda for the half day summit was as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 9 AM  | Coffee and Networking  |
| 9:30  | Welcome and Introductions—Freeholder Director Mirabella and County Manager George Devanney |
| 9:45  | Format for the Meeting   |
| 10:00 | What are the possibilities for sharing or regionalization of services?                     |
| 10:30 | What are the key possibilities for the sharing or regionalization of services?             |
| 11:00 | What are the issues related to the priority areas for sharing?                             |
| 11:45 | Closing  |
| Noon  | Lunch and more Networking  |

## **Results of the Summit—Inventory of Possibilities for Shared/Regional Services**

The first exercise of the summit engaged the participants in a modified TOP's

facilitated technique in creative brainstorming to identify all possibilities for sharing of services and or regionalized services. The question to be addressed by all participants was: What are the possibilities for sharing or regionalization of services? The exercise produced sixty (66) possibilities for shared and regionalized services

The inventory of ideas for shared services generated by the participants is as follows:

1. Information Technology
2. Technical Support of Computer Systems
3. IT person/Network Administrator
4. Desktop Software Licensing
5. Info Tech Technical Assistance
6. GIS Information Sharing and Training
7. Information Technology Disaster Recovery of Data
8. Web Hosting/E-mail Hosting/Internet Access
9. Sharing Access to the County's Fiber Optic System through Union County Community College
10. Animal Control Services
11. Wildlife Management for Deer and Geese
12. Deer Carcass Removal
13. Geese Control
14. Animal Control Shelter
15. Sharing of Fire Services
16. Sharing of Fire Safety Officials
17. Regionalization of Emergency Medical Services, especially during the daytime
18. Regionalization of Fire Departments
19. Sharing Rescue Squad Equipment
20. Sharing of Fire Department Equipment
21. Sharing Police Border Patrols
22. Regionalized Police/Fire/EMS Dispatch Center Operations
23. Regionalizing Police Command Structure to reduce high end leadership costs
24. Provide Police Services to towns which cannot provide affordable police services
25. Regionalizing Incident Command Centers
26. Office Cleaning Services
27. Coordinated/Shared Grass Cutting Services
28. Sharing of Traffic Safety Officer
29. Laboratory Services for Local Health Departments
30. Equipment sharing among municipal and county departments
31. Cooperative Purchasing
32. Regionalized Recycling Enforcement
33. County assisting municipalities with paving projects
34. Shared Flagger Safety Training
35. Shared Traffic Counts Services
36. Human Resources and Management
37. Regionalization of Public Health Services and Public Health Annexes
38. Regional or shared Construction Code services and other Code Enforcement services

39. Shared Project Management Services
40. Anti-terrorism planning and evaluation
41. Sharing of OEM equipment
42. Creating a joint health insurance joint insurance fund
43. County wide employee health benefits
44. Regionalized COAH compliance
45. Maintenance of Equipment for Fire/Parks/Public Works
46. Equipment Sharing
47. Equipment Moving
48. Sharing of Cost for Traffic Signage System
49. Shared Playground Safety Inspections Program
50. Shared Archival of Public Records
51. Continued Cooperation with the PARIS and Document Recovery System
52. Shared Sewer Services—Township of Berkeley Heights
53. Trees maintenance and emergency services
54. Shared Public Works Streets Maintenance
55. Sharing a Screener Machine
56. Common Street Paving Contracts
57. Sharing Street Striping Services—Sharing a Thermoplastic Striping Machine
58. Shared Garbage Disposal Services
59. Merge Municipal Courts
60. Regionalized Senior Centers
61. Regionalized Senior Transportation Services
62. Sharing Senior Citizen Coordinators
63. Sharing a Snow Melter
64. Sharing Snow Removal Services
65. Lake Management Services
66. Cooperative Contracting of Municipal Printing Needs

### **Priority Areas to Focus Attention for Shared/Regionalization of Services**

Using a method of prioritization, the participants selected four possibilities for priority consideration. The consensus areas are:

1. Information Technology Services
2. Regionalized 911/Dispatch Services
3. Animal Control Services
4. Regionalized EMS/Fire Services

### **Focused Discussions Concerning the Four Priority Areas**

The participants then broke into four separate groups to discuss in greater depth and detail the four selected areas for priority consideration. The participants self selected

which discussion they wanted to participate. The results of those discussions are as follows:

### Information Technology

#### *Current Level of Service*

The various municipalities experience a “hodgepodge” of information technology systems most of which are supported by outside, expensive consultants. While in-house IT support is the exception, some of the municipalities utilize a limited support staff of IT professionals coupled with outside consultant support. Each municipal government utilizes its own unique configuration of platform services, operating systems, and networks and is dependent on outside vendors for IT solutions and support. There is clearly a lack of municipal expertise in the area of information technology which leads to an expensively configured and maintained system in each municipality. In addition, most towns have not planned for nor maintain a disaster recovery plan.

#### *The Regionalized Service Alternative*

It was proffered that consideration be given to regionalizing IT services among municipalities with the County of Union serving as the lead agency.

#### *Improving through Sharing/Regionalization*

It is believed that through centralized, professional technical expertise with unified vendor support all municipalities in the county would save money and enhance the quality of IT services. Working with the municipalities the county would be able to develop uniform platforms, standardized hardware and software programming. Through a centralized system the county would be able to provide an in-house back-up support service which currently does not exist in the municipalities. Additionally, a standard disaster recovery plan could be effectively developed for all municipalities.

#### *Benefits*

Overall the county serving as the centralized lead agency would be able to achieve cost savings that would benefit all municipal governments through the elimination of redundancies in IT systems, service providers, satellite facilities, and information sharing. A centralized system would enable the bulk purchase of hardware and server systems, as well as software programs systems. Centralized uniformity would also facilitate cost savings in maintenance support.

The municipalities would also benefit through the use of the county’s fiber optic system allowing for increased and more reliable internet service. This would also save money by allowing for the elimination of the various internet providers currently serving some

towns. Municipal governments would also have access to the county's GIS system allowing for improved services in a wide range of municipal applications.

### *Cost Savings*

While hard and complex to quantify, cost savings on an aggregate level across all municipalities would yield overall cost savings through the elimination of IT redundancies, standardization of servers, hardware and software programs and the elimination of costly and duplicative vendor support.

### Centralized 911 Dispatch Services

#### *Current Level of Service*

Currently each municipality in the county operates and maintains its own central police and fire dispatch system. Each of the dispatch centers have communications equipment, separately maintains and employ municipal call takers to receive and dispatch calls to appropriate police and first responders. Each municipality provides for its own supervision and oversight of the operation, as well as its own training needs.

#### *The Regionalized Service Alternative*

It is suggested that one centralized 911 dispatch center operated by the county be given consideration.

#### *Improving through Sharing/Regionalization*

It is believed that the quality of dispatch services will be improved through centralized coordination and with enhanced training and support.

#### *Benefits*

The main benefit would be in the area of cost savings achieved by having one centralized dispatch center.

#### *Cost Savings*

It is believed that a centralized county operated dispatch center would save money across the board through the reduction of overhead, particularly salaries, pensions, health benefits and insurance; communications equipment and maintenance, personnel complement, and training costs.

### Animal Control Services and Regional Fire and EMS Services

The dialogue that ensued around animal control services involved the county consultant advising the municipal representatives on the status of the on-going feasibility study of the animal shelter.

### Regional Fire/EMS Services

Despite it being prioritized for further consideration, no municipal representative engaged in a dialogue of the Regional Fire/EMS Services possibility.

### **Feedback**

18 of approximately 20 people present before lunch completed the feedback.

#### Positives:

- Communication
- Idea Sharing
- Able to intake a lot of good information and meet new people as resources
- Meeting people who can help build new way to do things
- Great facilitating – it helped our group to hold in-depth discussion about dispatching and shared services
- Good connections made – numbers, names exchanged
- Facilities
- Parking
- Opportunity to meet others – mentioned twice
- Explore common ground for shared services
- Got good information about the status of an animal control center
- Shared ideas and concerns always a good idea
- Good brainstorming session – mentioned twice
- Participants are well informed
- Food
- Enjoyed learning county’s progress from various county employees/officials
- Appreciated finding out some sincere concerns of municipalities
- Able to share information to town officials concerned with some of their problems
- Able to enlighten some officials as to positive steps taken by county government on some of the issues
- Opened up communication with county and municipalities
- Organized very well –
- Educated informed county personnel available a plus
- Focusing on service needed by municipalities
- Possibilities of cost savings
- Current available resources information
- Uniformity
- The program was an opportunity to share information regarding shared services, i.e., by whom and at what potential costs (impacts).

- Opportunity to network – true shared service will evolve from trust and relationships of individuals
- Able to start process to discuss regional dispatch center with two other communities
- Learn about county study on combined 911 dispatch.

Areas for change (5 responders had no areas of change)

- Board of education should have been invited since most of all of our taxes are school related - mentioned twice
- Not enough municipal participation – mention three times
- None really – overall the seminar was great
- Poor attendance by top borough administrators – not county’s fault
- Should have had munis poll, preconference, their staff about problems that should have been address
- Need ideas to foster a better turnout
- Local home rule barriers
- Need to develop more detail
- Could have been more focused to contain a presentation on pros and cons of each topic – seemed disorganized
- A preview of what to expect
- Should make more time to talk about more items
- Didn’t discuss next steps.

**Next Steps**

It is recommended that the County consider filing SHARE Feasibility Study grant applications with the NJ Department of Community Affairs for the further analysis of sharing and or regionalizing information technology services, as well as developing a central county wide dispatch center.

As noted by one of the participants, the opportunity to network was valued because “true shared service will evolve from trust and relationships of individuals.” The participants welcomed the opportunity to learn and to network. The county has laid the foundation for buy-in by the munis. Additional work will involve more participation by the towns both in their presence as well as in their input.