

DCA wrong to shoot down merger study

DECEMBER 22, 2010

[Print this page](#) [E-mail this article](#) [Share](#) [Type Size](#) **A A A**

[Recommend](#)

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

0

1 | 2 [Next Page](#)

Merchantville and Cherry Hill should get state help in examining potential savings.

Maybe the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the primary state agency that works with municipal governments, doesn't want to see any towns merge. Maybe DCA Commissioner Lori Grifa or someone else in the DCA isn't eager to see towns start merging because if there are fewer towns, there might be less work for the DCA to do, and then the DCA could get downsized.

Perhaps that's far-fetched, but the DCA's rigidity in its decision last week to deny an application for Merchantville and Cherry Hill to study the possibility of merging is a head-scratcher.

The idea behind passing a state law in 2007 to encourage municipalities to explore potential mergers and save taxpayers dollars was a sound one. Equally sound was having the DCA provide money for towns interested in researching a merger to conduct a formal study. After all, it would be impossible to ask voters in two or more towns to go the polls and vote on merging their governments into one unless they had detailed data on exactly how much money would be saved. Thus, the need for studies.

Pushed by residents

So then, we come back to the DCA's decision regarding Merchantville and Cherry Hill. In tiny Merchantville, which abuts the northwest corner of Cherry Hill, an organized group of citizens fed up with rising property taxes has pushed for a merger with Cherry Hill. There are other motivations at play, as well, not the least of which would be a school district merger and a chance for Merchantville kids to move on eventually to Cherry Hill's highly rated high schools.

The citizens group, Merchantville Connecting for the Future, met the benchmark of getting signatures from more than 10 percent of the registered voters in the borough who voted in the 2009 election.

In Cherry Hill, the population of 70,000 makes getting the signatures of 10 percent of the people who voted in the last election a lot trickier. But the township council and Mayor Bernie Platt obliged the idea of at least studying the potential of a merger with Merchantville, so the council approved a resolution formally endorsing a study.

1 | 2 [Next Page](#)

In Your Voice | [READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY](#)

Related Stories

- 3 Camden County towns reach deal on trash collection
- South Jersey copes with mess
- Storm cancels events in South Jersey
- Messy morning commute for South Jersey

Related Topics

- [Places](#) - Cherry Hill, NJ, Merchantville, NJ

Contextual linking provided by Topix

EMAIL ALERTS

Subscribe to our **Breaking News** newsletters.
[View a sample](#)

» [Go to newsletters page.](#)

More Opinion Headlines

State should stick to the spending cap (7)

Anonymous (2)

Body snatching (2)

No credibility (3)

Latest Headlines

Burlco transportation services canceled today

Really last minute: Customers buy shovels, salt after storm

Storm affects mail delivery

Stocks dip after China raises rates

Are you a virtual smoker?



\$100 for a 6-month membership at Kings Grant Fitness Center

Only **\$100** Save **63%**



BUY NOW!

DCA wrong to shoot down merger study

DECEMBER 22, 2010

[Print this page](#) [E-mail this article](#) [Share](#) [Type Size A A A](#)

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

0

[Previous Page](#) 1 | [2](#)

(2 of 2)

The state's 2007 Local Option Consolidation Act allows for either a valid petition or governing body resolution to open the door to a formal study and getting DCA funds for the study.

However, the DCA says it cannot be mix-and-match. It has taken the most strict interpretation of the 2007 law possible and said that the application can't have a citizens' petition from one town and a council resolution from the other. So it rejected the application to provide funds for a study.

Senseless

Bureaucratic, narrow-thinking nonsense is the best description we can come up with for the decision to deny this study on these grounds.

We're not talking about an actual merger here -- that would be years away and require a vote by residents of both municipalities.

No, we're just talking about providing some money for a study to look at all the potential issues a merger would present and what the various costs and savings would be. And the DCA wants to nitpick the law in finding a way to shoot down such a study? It's absurd.

As Bob Stocker, member of Merchantville Connecting for the Future, points out, the reason the 2007 law cites for allowing citizens to do a petition to advance a study is so they can get around politicians who might not want to study a merger that might take away their power. And, there's legislation recently introduced in the State House to ensure that such merger study applications are not rejected when one town presents a citizens' petition and another presents a council resolution.

Bottom line -- the DCA made a poor choice in rejecting this application.

Luckily, it seems the process will still go forward. Merchantville Mayor Frank North said both towns will continue to discuss a consolidation study and Cherry Hill officials continue to express optimism about it, as well.

We would urge members of Merchantville Connecting for the Future and other residents of both communities smart enough to understand the wisdom of studying consolidation as a means of saving taxpayers money to push the governing bodies of both Merchantville and Cherry Hill to approve resolutions in support of a study.

Even those council members in Merchantville or Cherry Hill who may not want to see a merger should have the sense to know that standing in the way of formally studying the issue is a disservice to all residents. Examining what a merger would entail and mean financially is the prudent, responsible thing to do.

[Previous Page](#) 1 | [2](#)

In Your Voice | [READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY](#)

Related Stories

- 3 Camden County towns reach deal on trash collection
- South Jersey copes with mess
- Storm cancels events in South Jersey
- Messy morning commute for South Jersey

Related Topics

- Places - Cherry Hill, NJ, Merchantville, NJ

Contextual linking provided by Topix

EMAIL ALERTS

Subscribe to our **Breaking News** newsletters.
[View a sample](#)

» [Go to newsletters page.](#)

More Opinion Headlines

State should stick to the spending cap (7)

Anonymous (2)

Body snatching (2)

No credibility (3)

Latest Headlines

Burlco transportation services canceled today

Really last minute: Customers buy shovels, salt after storm

Storm affects mail delivery

Stocks dip after China raises rates

Are you a virtual smoker?



\$100 for a 6-month membership at Kings Grant Fitness Center

Only **\$100** Save **63%**



BUY NOW!