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Town merger advocate brings her message to Northern Valley

Friday, October 15, 2010

BY MIKE CURLEY
NORTHERN VALLEY SUBURBANITE
Staff Writer

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NORTHVALE — A supporter of the consolidation of municipalities brought her message to Northvale residents on Oct. 12.

Gina Genovese and Wendy McCahill, founders of Courage to Connect NJ a non-profit promoting consolidation of municipalities, were invited to speak to area residents by Northvale Councilman Andrew Gullestad after he heard a presentation from the group earlier in the year.

The purpose of the presentation was to inform residents of the benefits of consolidating towns in order to bring property taxes under control.

"We're all here to figure out how to make things better," Gullestad said, welcoming those who attended the presentation.

Consolidating towns would consist of bringing several smaller towns into one, with one mayor and council, and one set of administration and services, watching over the town to avoid duplicating responsibilities and costs.

"We're all in this together," said Genovese, a former mayor of Long Hill in Morris County.

Genovese said she was in Northvale because she's seen budgets struggling throughout the state, with taxpayers having to pick up the tab.

"And we're struggling too," she said, with many leaving the state in response.

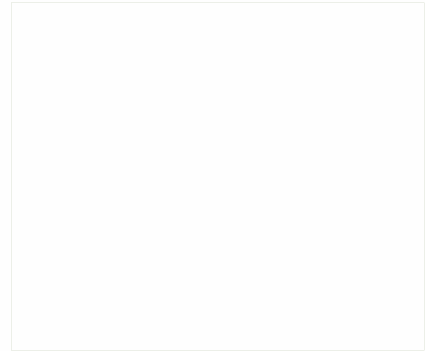
Consolidation, she said, is not a new idea in the state, citing an 1895 newspaper article discussing the idea in regard to the Oranges.

"We're in the same place now," she said, noting the article cites similar reasons for consolidation as her group is advocating. Residents, she said, will have to look at the state, municipalities, and themselves differently in order to move forward, or else the problems will remain.

During the presentation, McCahill displayed placards with the names and populations of the state's 566 municipalities, in descending order of population, to impress on the crowd just how many there are, and how small they are, with very few above the population threshold that will allow them to attract attention for federal aid.

Genovese outlined efforts the state has made since the 1970s to curb property tax distress, including the income tax, the "Atlantic City Fix" of using gambling income, the pension deferral and the cap on municipal tax increases. All of these, she said, only treated the effects, and not the causes, and subsequent efforts, such as the 2 percent cap, will only weaken municipalities.

Now, she said, people are ready to begin treating the causes. Many municipalities, she said, have tried sharing services, but in her experience as mayor of Long Hill, it brought little savings, and the tax rates continued to rise, while the agreements needed to be updated and maintained, bringing administrative and legal costs up.



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area, which consists of 10 participating towns, all governed under the Woodbridge mayor and council, with each town represented on that council.

Each is distinct, she said, with strong town identities. The state, she added, is so strong in its roots that she feels no town would lose its identity through consolidation.

By consolidating, Woodbridge is of a size that makes it easier to bring in jobs, and to have access to federal funding for its projects. By streamlining the government, all of its communities benefit.

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- Tuesday October 19, 2010, 7:56 AM - **Observer2** says:
 Resident08: Forget what I say, let's go with what the Mayors of three towns and Councils of two had to say about the benefits of saving tax dollars by merging departments. The only people who didn't want to understand it were the Winans-Gullestad voting block on the Northvale Council - the ones with all the "experience". Another lost opportunity and embarrassment for Northvale brought to you by the "experienced" people who were elected to do a job, but then can't ever seem to attend meetings and do it.
- Monday October 18, 2010, 5:28 PM - **NorthvaleFirst** says:
 Gullestaad's only record is that he is the son-in-law of a former councilman who continues to pull the puppet strings behind the scenes. He has done nothing in his 3 years on the council. A last minute "sneak" energy audit, last minute meeting with a consolidation group and now he is claiming he pulled all the grants together for the school soccer fields. I hope the Board of Ed shreds him for it. Councilman like him are the reason this town is in the disarray it is.
- Monday October 18, 2010, 10:19 AM - **Resident08** says:
 Observer: merging building departments doesn't touch tax dollars no matter how many times you say it. Gullestad at least has a record while running against 3 people with a total of 3 year's government experience one of which probably cannot find Town Hall. The truth is that both parties have lagged here because of fear. Who's going to begin talks of merging police and dpw? We need a governor with a set to legislate it and then the locals will need to execute.
- Monday October 18, 2010, 8:31 AM - **Observer2** says:
 Northvale should be well advanced in consolidations. Instead, nothing has happened. Cost savings for Northvale taxpayers have been blocked for three years by the do nothing/no show Republican majority Council. The other towns don't even want to talk to these clowns anymore. Now, two weeks before his re-election bid, the Northvale Republican Club brings a dog and pony show to town to make it appear that Gullestad is actually doing something for taxpayers with his Council seat. That is, besides taking up space and walloping them with ridiculous tax increases every year and spending them into the poor house. So, the game is do nothing for the entire three years of your Council term and then spend the last two weeks attempting to deceive people into thinking that you have been more than a non-entity. For Gullestad, it has to be more effective than running on his record.
- Friday October 15, 2010, 3:36 PM - **somewhatintelligent** says:
 Its not peoples fear of losing their identity, its the town employees and the governing bodies fear of losing their jobs and control of the tax income!!!

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