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## Merchantville residents consider study of merger

By **JULIE SHANNON** • *Courier-Post Staff* •  
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**MERCHANTVILLE** — An advocate of municipal mergers spoke here Wednesday night, but not everyone in the audience embraced her views.

Gina Genovese, founder of Courage to Connect NJ, was brought in by members of a local group that put together a petition in July urging a study of a possible merger between Merchantville and Cherry Hill.

"It's a message that we're presenting all around the state, that this is a problem for [New Jersey](#)," Genovese told her listeners at First Presbyterian Church.

She said duplicated efforts among multiple municipalities are "a major cause of our fiscal instability."

Emotions ran high as people on both sides expressed their views on the issue.

Some residents worried over a merger's impact on local services in this borough of almost 3,800 residents. Cherry Hill has about 78,000 residents.

"When you're in a small town, you can get things done," said resident Pam Matukonis. "If I need to pick up the phone and call the mayor (of Merchantville), he'll know who I am."

In an effort to ease those concerns, Genovese spoke about Woodbridge, Middlesex County, where she said 10 communities exist within one township. A single mayor and one police chief serve the 98,000 residents there.

"They all have distinct identities," noted Genovese, a former mayor of Long Hill, Morris County. "You know when you cross a line from Avenel to Woodbridge."

Resident Katherine Brown went to the meeting to hear more information and was glad she came out.

"It was very informative," she said. "I love Merchantville and don't want to move, but would like to see the town move forward. This is for New Je-

rsey, not only for the little town of Merchantville."

Genovese praised the members of Merchantville Connecting for the Future, for taking advantage of the 2007 legislation that was put in place to allow the residents the same power and right as elected officials.

"They are pioneers," she said. "It's the first time in N. J. that the 2007 legislation has been used by citizens to say we want to try and find a better way.

"I think that what they did could empower the whole state and residents who say 'I want to take the power in my own hands.' "

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