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Consolidation effort draws small but ardent crowd

Thursday, September 16, 2010

BY ERIK SHILLING
THE RECORD
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PARK RIDGE — A presentation by municipal consolidation advocates attracted a small group of local residents, councilmen and activists on Wednesday night.

The group, Courage to Connect NJ, urged residents to think boldly about consolidating towns, suggesting at one point the elimination of seven or eight municipalities in northern Bergen County to create a larger one, the Pascack Valley.

"A lot of people are saying that what we currently do is unsustainable," said Gina Genovese, the group's director and a former Park Ridge mayor. "I didn't talk about whether there was a Republican administration or a Democratic administration. That has nothing to do with it."

They argue that by combining police and public service departments, and by merging town government, redundancies will be reduced and taxpayers will pay meaningfully less in property taxes.

Local reaction to the idea was mixed, with some residents expressing fear that local identity will be diminished. Few expect much to happen in the near future, though Genovese said that an "iceberg" was approaching.

"There's a fear of the unknown with this, and that's what drives a lot of it," said Steven Hopper, Park Ridge councilman. "It's about saving money and being sustainable, but it's also about better services."

Bob Stocker, 36, of Merchantville, Camden County, said that he'd successfully led a petition drive to study the issue there.

"My wife and I got married nine years ago, and she kept her name," Stocker said. "And we're still married."

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