

PUBLIC HEARING POLICE CONSOLIDATION

**July 25, 2013
6:00 P.M.**

Present: Councilmembers; Bosi, Galdi, Oppelt, Hopper, Kilmartin, Council President Misciagna and Mayor Maguire

Also Present: John Ten Hoeve, Borough Attorney
Colleen Ennis, CFO
Kelley O'Donnell, Borough Clerk/Administrator
Richard Brady, Matrix Consulting

Mayor issued opening statement complimenting BC Prosecutor, Park Ridge Police Department and Matrix Consulting. Indicated that the Borough had complied with all requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding. Explained that the purpose of the hearing was to secure public comment on the Consolidation Study prepared by Matrix.

Richard Brady explained the results of the consolidation study utilizing a video presentation as well as issuing handouts summarizing the results of the study. He indicated that the company had performed many such studies and he described the method and process underlying the study

Richard Brady stated that he looked at the delivery of law enforcement services as currently exist in the three subject boroughs, that he reached out to representatives of the police, officials for the borough's and, with regard to Park Ridge, arranged a focus group that provided early public feedback.

Richard Brady discussed positive current factors for the towns, including incredibly rapid response times, high service levels and low call volumes. He noted that the low call volumes enabled town forces to have a significant amount of proactive time.

Richard Brady discussed a report summary by describing all of the contents of the report summary attached hereto. He noted that even if the departments were merged, the result would still be equal to that of a relatively small community having a population of about 20,000 and covering about 10 square miles.

Richard Brady noted that the study set forth three alternative plans. The first plan retained staffing levels for patrolmen, but reduced supervisory staff only. The second proposal included some staffing reductions. The third proposal reduced some services by assigned staff to different service positions.

Mr. Brady summarized the projected savings that would result from consolidation, essentially ranging between one million and two million dollars per year.

Mr. Brady closed with suggestions for improved law enforcement services if no consolidation were to take place.

Mayor Maguire stated that if a consolidation were to take place, using the figures projected by Matrix, the approximate savings per taxpayer in the Borough of Park Ridge, assuming all savings were divided equally among the three participating municipalities, would be between \$100 and \$133.

Martha Fornatale, a resident, stated that the quality of service provided by the Park Ridge Police Department was exceptional. She indicated that the members of the department were members of the community and that she knew some by name. She also stated that the response time provided in Park Ridge was excellent. Mr. Brady responded by indicating that the same conditions would exist after consolidation, and that the combined force would employ the same personnel and service a relatively small community.

Chief Joseph Madden stated that the projected response times in the Matrix report, as described by Richard Brady, were incorrect. He further stated that there would be a reduction in the number of patrolmen on duty per shift.

Jeff Hollyhead Asked whether the same levels of service would be provided. Richard Brady responded by indicating that under proposal number one, there would be no change in any service level and that the same number of patrolmen would be employed.

Chief Madden then stated that the study was inaccurate and that his experience for many years within the Borough convinced him that a consolidation would result in a decline in the level of service.

Forde Prigot, a resident, asked whether any consolidation could take place if Montvale refused to participate as stated in recent newspaper articles. Richard Brady noted that two communities could consolidate, but that the study had focused on the consolidation of three communities.

Lucy Heller testified that she did not believe the consolidation would be appropriate since another level of government supervision would be created. Ms. Heller stated that she would rather see a consolidation of all three boroughs, not simply the three police departments.

Tracy Dickinson, resident, stated that she was opposed to the merger. She stated that her life had been saved as a result of the police department's prompt response to an allergic reaction. She believed that response times would increase if the departments were consolidated. She argued that police officers would lose positions. Mr. Brady responded by indicating that there would be no termination of employees, but that the plan contemplated reductions only through attrition.

William Fenwick, resident, as whether there will be referendum on the issue of consolidation. He was advised that the governing bodies of each municipality were empowered pursuant to the MOU to determine whether or not to present the question to the public by way of referendum.

George Heller, resident, complimented Mr. Brady, but stated that he was opposed to the consolidation. He indicated that he believed the savings would be minimal. He suggested that the Borough of Park Ridge pursue ways to improve service without consolidation. He asked Mr. Brady what areas would be most appropriate for change and was advised that traffic control and management concerns would be the most likely areas for improvement.

Chief Madden stated that the proposal would result in reduced staffing and that reduced staffing would result in lower levels of service. He further suggested that the Borough listen to the comments of residents who seemed to be opposed to consolidation.

Bob Ciarletta stated that he and his family felt safe in Park Ridge, describing the borough as "utopia." He stated that he would not feel safe if the police departments were merged.

Joseph LaPaglia, ex-mayor of Woodcliff Lake, described the initiation of the consolidation study process and his involvement with the Bergen County Prosecutor in making the study a reality. He objected to public comments concerning safety concerns, indicating that the consolidation would not result in a decline in public safety. He also criticized rumors that were circulating stating that the consolidation could not take place because Park Ridge was a Civil Service town and the other two communities were not.

Richard Brady responded by stating that state law allowed the consolidation of police departments even when one department was a civil service town. He also repeated the fact that there would be a savings of between one and two million dollars. He further stated that the savings did not have to be passed on to tax payers but could be used for other police purposes.

The public hearing ended at approximately 7:45 p.m.