

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Representatives from East Manchester Township and Mount Wolf Borough formed a Joint Agreement Committee and met in public sessions to examine the feasibility of merging the two municipalities.

The Pennsylvania Economy League, Central PA, LLC (PEL), was engaged to provide technical assistance and facilitation services pursuant to the financial and operational elements of a possible merger of the two jurisdictions. PEL agreed to do so in order to provide the Joint Agreement Committee, other officials, and the public with comprehensive and impartial factual data on the projected financial impact of the merger.

The determination of the overall feasibility, practicality, and advisability of a merger and the decision to place a merger question on the ballot is exclusively the responsibility of the Joint Agreement Committee and the governing bodies of the two municipalities.

East Manchester Township and Mount Wolf Borough already provide a variety of services to their residents through regional or shared services including: police service through the Northeastern Regional Police Department; fire service through the Volunteer Fire Department and the Union Volunteer Fire Company; EMS coverage through the Northeastern Emergency Services; and sewage collection and treatment through the Northeastern York County Sewer Authority.

Refuse collection and disposal are provided by contracting with private haulers in both the Township and the Borough.

Water is provided independently by a private water utility or by wells in the area.

East Manchester Township

East Manchester Township provides various public works services; planning and codes enforcement and recreational facilities and program contributions.

No street lighting is provided in East Manchester Township except in an industrial area and is financed by a front footage assessment. There is fire hydrant service in a portion of the Township which is paid for by the Township through a separate hydrant fund tax. The Township has a municipal building as well as a township garage.

Mount Wolf Borough

Mount Wolf Borough has fire hydrant service which is financed from Borough general tax revenues.

Street lighting is provided throughout the Borough and is financed by general tax revenues.

The Borough has a Borough Hall as well as a maintenance building/shed area.

The Borough provides public works services.

School District

Under Pennsylvania law, school district boundaries are independent of the municipal boundaries and/or municipal configurations. Consequently, students who reside in East Manchester Township and/or Mount Wolf Borough would continue to attend Northeastern York County School District.

Demographics

East Manchester Township

The population of East Manchester Township increased from 1,784 in 1950 to 5,078 in 2000, and to an estimated 6,876 in 2006.

Between 1980 and 2000 the number of housing units in East Manchester Township increased by 688 units or 53.0 percent.

In 2000, East Manchester Township residents had an average per capita income of \$20,559.

Mount Wolf Borough

Between 1950 and 2000, the population of Mount Wolf Borough increased from 1,164 to 1,373, or by 209 persons. Its population in 2006 is estimated at 1,553.

The number of housing units in Mount Wolf Borough was 558 in 1980 and increased by 12 to 570 in 2000.

The 2000 per capita income for Mount Wolf Borough residents was \$19,760—\$1,326 or 6.3 percent lower than the figure for York County (\$21,086).

Merger

Based on discussions in the Joint Committee Meeting it was assumed that the joining of the two jurisdictions would be by merger: Mount Wolf Borough would be terminated as a legal entity and become part of East Manchester Township.

- Name – The name of the legal merged entity would be East Manchester Township; however, for purposes of geographic description the area of Mount Wolf Borough would be designated the village of Mount Wolf.
- Form of government – The government would be as provided for in the Second Class Township Code, and as now operational in East Manchester Township.
- Taxes and Fees – General purpose taxes would be uniform throughout the merged municipality and at the rate presently existing in East Manchester Township. Charges for major government services would be standardized to the extent practical given existing contractual and operational limitations at the East Manchester Township levels.

Transitional Provisions

- The post merger Township Board of Supervisors would increase in number from three (3) to five (5) from the merger date of January 1, 2009, until the seating of elected officials in January 2012 after the next post merger municipal election (November 2011).
- The two additional supervisors would be two currently serving council members from Mount Wolf Borough who would be chosen by the Mount Wolf Borough Council prior to January 1, 2009.
- Service Levels – In general, municipal services would be maintained at the levels now provided in East Manchester Township.
- Police Service – After completion of the merger of Mount Wolf Borough into East Manchester Township, East Manchester Township would continue to be a member of the Northeastern Regional Police Department and residents would continue to receive police protection from the regional department.
- The transition agreement provided that although the Supervisors of the merged township would have the right of appointment to the Police Commission as the governing body of the merged municipality, they would appoint members to that committee as vacancies arose so as to continue to give the "Mount Wolf" area representation in proportion to that

which is in effect on June 30, 2007. Such proportional representation would remain in effect for a period not to exceed ten years from the date of the merger.

- Fire Protection and EMS Service – Fire protection and EMS Services would continue in effect as presently provided by the Eagle Hose Volunteer Fire Company and Union Volunteer Fire Company and Northeastern Emergency Services.
- Sanitary Sewer Service and Membership in the Northeastern York County Sewer Authority – The transition agreement provide that after completion of the merger East Manchester Township would continue to be a member of the Northeastern York County Sewer Authority and residents would continue to receive sewage collection and treatment from the Authority. It was expressly stated that although the supervisors of the merged township as the governing body would have the right of appointment as vacancies arose to the Sewer Authority Board, they would appoint members to that Board so as to continue to give Mount Wolf Area representation in a manner in effect prior to the merger and in conformance with the rate areas as stipulated in the various agreements and Articles of Incorporation of the Sewer Authority which existed prior to merger. In like manner, nothing in the merger or transition would cause any change in the rate structure which was in place prior to the merger. Finally, these provisions would stay in effect for the life of the Authority.
- Street Lights – Street lights which are now provided for throughout the Borough of Mount Wolf would continue to be provided subsequent to the merger except that such costs would be billed and accounted for as a separate street light district. The tariff for such lighting would be on a property assessed valuation basis with the millage rate set by the Township Supervisors.
- Fire hydrants – After the merger all existing hydrants would be retained. The revenue to pay for such service would be based on the assessed valuation of the properties which receive hydrant coverage.
- Streets and Roads – The maintenance and repair of streets and roads (including snow plowing and removal) would generally follow the policy and procedures followed in East Manchester Township. However, it was expressly understood that snow plowing and snow removal for alley ways in the Mount Wolf area would continue to receive service comparable to that which they received prior to the merger.

- Code enforcement activities would be handled through the existing East Manchester Township system.
- It is PEL's understanding that the planning and zoning configuration presently in place in Mount Wolf Borough would be "grandfathered" into the township's ordinance after a merger. Further, it is the intent that any future zoning changes would be made within the scope of good governance and applicable state statutes.
- The merger would result in the retention of the existing full-time staff and structure of East Manchester Township. In addition, the present Mount Wolf Borough Secretary would be retained at least for a one-year transition period to assist with clerical functions. The compensation level to accomplish this was retained in the estimated merged municipal budget.

Changes in Total Taxes on a Hypothetical Household for 2006 as Merged
2006

2006 Taxes	Change After Merger	
	Village of Mount Wolf	East Manchester Township
	\$	\$
General Purpose Real Estate Taxes	-183.97	NC
Special Purpose Fire Hydrant	12.36	- 3.29
Special Purpose Street Lighting	33.63	NC
Earned Income Tax	NC	NC
Per Capita Municipal	10.00	NC
Per Capita School District	- 10.00	NC
Dollar Change	\$ -137.98	\$ -3.29
Percentage Change	- 24.60	- 0.69

NC= No Change

Municipal Millage Rates
Before Merger and as Estimated After Merger Based on 2006 Rates

Municipal Real Estate Tax Rates	Village of Mount Wolf Mills	East Manchester Township Mills
<u>Before Merger</u>		
General Fund Mills	2.900	1.040
Street Light Tax	NA	NA
Fire Hydrant Mills	NA	0.150
Total All Taxes Before Merger	<u>2.900</u>	<u>1.190</u>
<u>After Merger</u>		
Real Estate General Fund	1.040	1.040
Street Light Tax	0.340	NC
Fire Hydrant Tax	0.125	0.125
Total All Taxes After Merger	<u>1.505</u>	<u>1.165</u>
Millage Reduction After Merger	-1.395	-0.025
Percentage Reduction	47.9%	2.1%

NC= No Change NA=Not Applicable

**THIS THURSDAY MARCH 27 AT 7 PM.
THERE WILL BE A PUBLIC INFORMATION
MEETING FOR THE BORO RESIDENTS OF
MT. WOLF**

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY THE
MERGER OF MT. WOLF BORO WITH EAST
MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP WAS STUDIED AND
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE STUDY
PROCESS REVEALED PLEASE ATTEND THIS
INFORMATION MEETING !**

**THE PEOPLE MAKING THE PRESENTATION WILL BE FROM THE:
*BORO
*PENNSYLVANIA ECONOMY LEAGUE
*STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**NOTE: THERE WILL BE PRINTED
INFORMATION SHEETS AVAILABLE FOR
EVERYONE.**

**For anyone that wants to read or copy the complete PEL Report
you are welcome to view, copy and print the report online. Keep
in mind, this report is 88 pages long.**

<http://www.pelcentral.org/mergerstudy.pdf>

CU THURSDAY EVENING !



No need for Mount Wolf to merge with township

PATRICE POET

Article Last Updated: 04/06/2008 02:22:06 AM EDT

Because of the recent attention to the proposed merger of Mount Wolf Borough and East Manchester Township and those being oblivious to the vote that was already taken to end the merger, continuing meetings that are not sanctioned by Mount Wolf Borough Council, I would like to share my thoughts and concerns as to why I voted no to the merger, and why I will continue to do so.

I have resided in the borough since 1979, serving in various capacities over the years from borough secretary, tax collector, school board member to January of 2006 when I began my term as a borough council member. At that time I volunteered to participate on the merger committee and have attended those meetings over the past two years.

Initially, the Pennsylvania Economy League requested budgets from each municipality involved, which at the time also included Manchester Borough. All three municipalities provided their budgets to PEL. After reviewing the budgets, PEL came back to the merger committee and said this merger won't work with the figures provided, so we have to change the figures so it does work. At that point, all I saw were red flags flying. Change the numbers

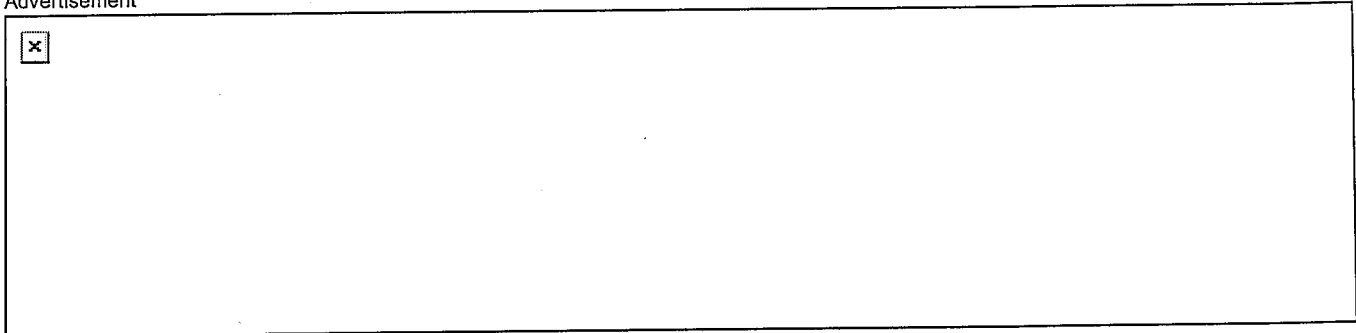
so it works on paper? PEL explained that the township's budget needs to be reviewed and amounts deleted from their budget, which were hopefully one-time expenses, so that the numbers would work for the merger. So that is exactly what happened.

Please do not take the promised tax savings at face value. First of all, those numbers used were not only changed, but are old numbers. If this merger would fly, we are looking at 2009. Everyone's budgets will certainly change until then, and so those promised tax dollars saved could be gone in an instant.

I would like to share with you a concern regarding the East Manchester Township's 2008 budget, which anyone may obtain from the township's office. In 2008, the township's predicted revenue is \$1.8 million with expenses of \$3 million. They are balancing their budget with their fund balance, which, according to their budget, leaves them a balance at the end of 2008 of \$19,420. In the October 2007 minutes of the supervisors' meetings, the township manager expresses concerns over the 2008 budget and his concern for 2009. My concern is if there is such a small amount of fund balance to fall back on, where is the revenue coming from for 2009? Our borough's 2008 budget shows a \$77,057 fund balance at the end of this year -- more than the township's \$19,420 year-end balance.

Our borough, I feel, always has been run as efficiently as possible. There are no full-time employees, therefore no benefits to pay. Our

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overhead is very low and I don't believe the township could run this borough as efficiently as it has been run in the past or as it is now.

Our borough government is very simple. Rep. Gillespie visited a borough meeting earlier last year, and when he left he said he was very happy that our only problems were birds and rabbits. We have very little going on, and that makes easy access to borough officials for any problems that may arise, no matter how small. The township, on the other hand, has meetings that last for hours. They have to continually deal with subdivisions, developers and zoning, which take up most of their time, as well as many other large issues that consume their meetings. Our borough government is very resident friendly and very efficient. We have little red tape to go through to get things accomplished. Try that at the township level. It is a very different story. Not because East Manchester Township is any different than any other township in York County; it is just the nature of the beast.

Knowing exactly where your tax dollars go is another issue. As you know, the bigger an area becomes the less you know where your dollars are being spent, i.e., county and state government. I know where my \$400 of borough taxes are spent each year. The majority is spent for police coverage and the remainder to keep the borough safe for the residents and looking nice. I can see that every day. With a larger area to cover, that view becomes less clear.

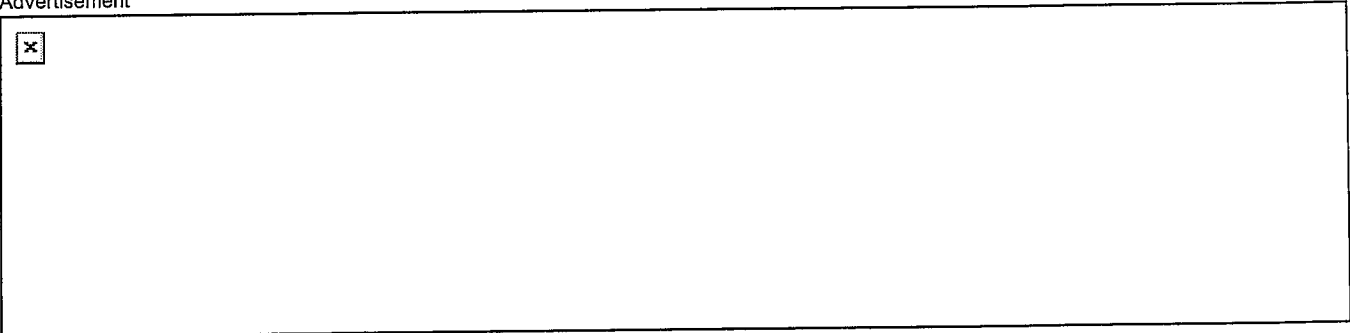
Your borough officials live where you live. Deal with exactly the same things you deal with.

There are probably very few persons in the borough who do not live within a street or two of a borough official. Again, easy access to them.

Representation is an additional concern. At the current time, we have seven borough council members and a mayor representing each and every resident in the borough. If the merger would occur, the current three township supervisors would remain and an additional two supervisors would be appointed from the current borough council to serve for three years only. After that time, the supervisors would drop back to three. Three people to make decisions for an entire area. With three persons, you only need two people to agree on something to make it happen. This is definitely not an arrangement that I am comfortable with. We would be creating a larger municipality, but not increase representation.

The police department is another issue. At this time, the amount each of the three municipalities pays is based upon several different items. One being population. The larger the population and area, the larger portion of the police budget each municipality is responsible for. The township, of course, is paying the larger portion. Currently, the formula used is based upon the 2000 census. We all are aware of what has happened in the township since that time, a large growth in population. Therefore, when the future formula is calculated based upon a newer census, the township will be responsible for an even larger portion of the police budget, therefore reducing the boroughs' portions. If a merger would occur, the residents of Mount

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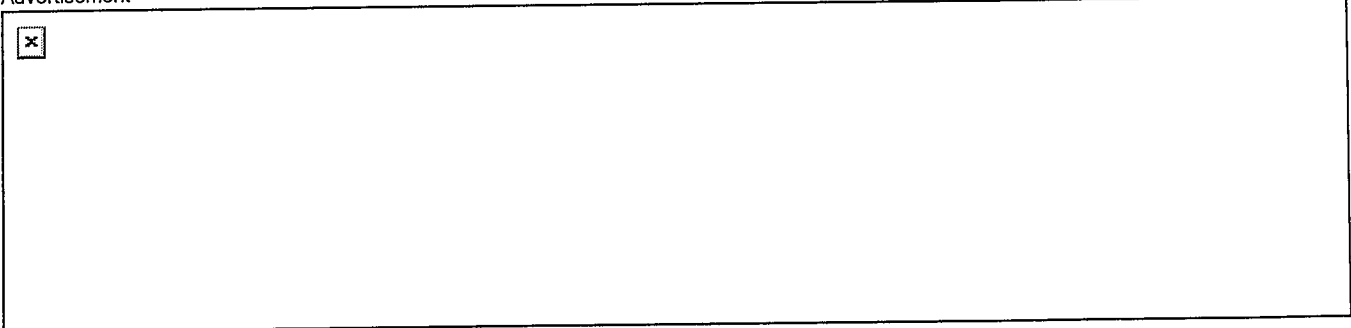
Wolf would be impacted by this increased portion of the police budget. I am certainly not saying Mount Wolf's portion would be reduced dollar-wise, because the police budget will certainly continue to increase, but the borough's overall percentage of responsibility should definitely be reduced.

What exactly is wrong with Mount Wolf at this time? In the two years on the council and the many years I served as borough secretary, I never recall anyone attending a borough meeting to complain about their borough taxes. I truly believe that most residents are satisfied with the way their borough taxes are being spent and the services they are provided with.

I've loved this town for the 28 years I have been living here, and I would never cast a vote that would jeopardize this community and its residents.

Patrice Poet is a member of the Mount Wolf Borough Council.

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Economy League was neutral in merger process

FRED CALLAHAN

Article Last Updated: 04/13/2008 02:08:00 AM EDT

I am the chairman of the York County Committee of the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL) and am writing to respond to an opinion piece by Patrice Poet that appeared in the Daily Record on April 6. In the commentary, Ms. Poet references the work of the Pennsylvania Economy League and its role as consultant to the municipalities of Mount Wolf Borough and East Manchester Township.

Initially, PEL was enlisted to review the possible merger of three municipalities -- Mount Wolf Borough, East Manchester Township and Manchester Borough. After initial discussions, Manchester Borough withdrew from the discussions. The process continued but with only the two municipalities. By referencing the original scope of work, Ms. Poet has fundamentally misstated the basis and the conclusions of the PEL study for Mount Wolf Borough and East Manchester Township.

PEL's original proposal for the study of three municipalities had the stipulation that after a review of the three municipal budgets, there would be a meeting to discuss the preliminary analysis, at which time each municipality would have to agree to proceed. PEL's presentation to the joint committee of

all three municipalities offered budget data intended to maintain the same level of services and demonstrated possible reduction of tax effort in the two boroughs. After officials from the Borough of Manchester voted to withdraw from the merger study; the remaining municipal officials voted to proceed with only two municipalities: Mount Wolf Borough and East Manchester Township.


PEL provided the remaining borough and township with its final analysis of the proposed merger in December 2007. PEL's role was to gather the necessary budget data, organize it in an impartial fashion that allowed discussion and debate, and publicly answer any questions that might arise. At no time was PEL to issue recommendations either for or against the proposal. PEL has more than 70 years of experience providing impartial and non-partisan research to individuals and governments to help make important decisions.

The discussions of mergers or consolidations of governments is a serious and often heated public debate. The first casualty of these discussions cannot be truth or accuracy. PEL stands by the quality of its efforts to assist the borough and the township. No one -- neither proponents nor opponents of a possible merger -- should use inaccuracies and misstatements to cloud the process. The PEL study is provided solely to provide insight and information for decision-makers. In closing, allow me to quote from the first chapter of the PEL merger study:

"The determination of the overall feasibility,

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practicality and advisability of a merger and the decision to place a merger question on the ballot is exclusively the responsibility of the Joint Agreement Committee and the governing bodies of the two municipalities."

Fred Callahan is chairman of the York County Committee of the Pennsylvania Economy League.

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MOUNT WOLF: Merger's 'met its demise'

Daily Record/Sunday News

Article Last Updated: 04/09/2008 06:15:36 AM EDT

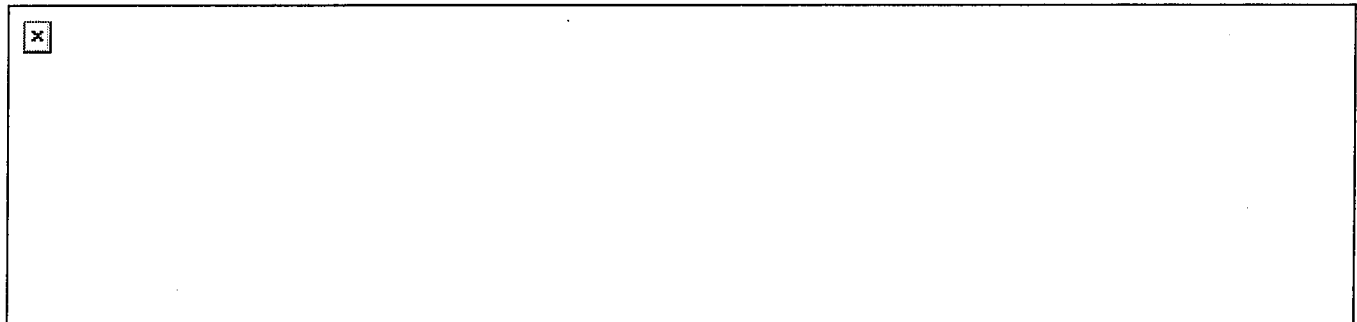
A proposed merger between Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township appears dead.

Mount Wolf's borough council decided Tuesday night to send a letter to the Pennsylvania Economy League, which completed the merger study, saying its services are no longer needed.

The council voted 4-3 in February not to move forward with the merger. Residents could still raise the merger issue if they want, said Ron Walker, council president and chairman of the merger committee. However, he doesn't think they are feeling the pressure to move ahead.

"It's kind of met its demise," Walker said after the meeting.

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THE YORK DISPATCH
York County's All-Access Paper

Talk of merger in Mount Wolf persists despite council's 'no' vote

ANDREW RUSONIS *For The York Dispatch*

Article Last Updated: 03/28/2008 10:47:38 AM EDT

Mount Wolf residents are still considering the possible impact of a merger with East Manchester Township two weeks after the borough council voted against continuing merger talks.

Mount Wolf Borough Council President Ron Walker hosted an unofficial informational meeting at the Eagle Fire Co. Thursday night to share information about a Pennsylvania Economic League study commissioned in 2005 to explore the possibility of the merger.

At its March 11 meeting, the council voted 4-3 against proceeding with merger talks. Walker voted in favor of continuing talks.

If the council had proceeded with the negotiations, a referendum on the merger could have appeared on the ballot in November.

Study findings: Thursday's meeting included a presentation by Gerald Cross and Harry Miller of the Pennsylvania Economy League.

They explained the findings of the study to the audience of about 30, and a six-page summary of the 88-page report was made available to the audience.

Cross said the study found that, based on 2006 taxes for Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township, the municipal property tax rate for the

median residence in Mount Wolf would be reduced about 48 percent, a reduction of 1.395 mills, for a savings of \$138 if the merger happened.

Cross also noted the job of the study was to simply examine the consequences of a merger, not to suggest a course of action for the municipalities.

The merger proposal called for Mount Wolf to be absorbed into East Manchester Township, with one elected board overseeing the two merged municipalities.

Residents respond: After the presentation, many in the audience questioned why residents were not given the opportunity to choose whether or not to go through with the merger.

"Their opposition was sentimental," resident Renate Deckman said of council members who voted to end the merger talks.

However, some residents took issue with the report. Borough tax collector Charles Stambaugh voiced his opinion that the tax data used for the study was inaccurate and most residents would save less than the report stated.

After the meeting, residents Bill and Cornelia Wolf expressed their support for the measure.

"We've been in favor since the beginning," said Cornelia Wolf. "I'm afraid our borough is going to die if it doesn't somehow expand."

When asked if they would return to the council and voice their opinion, Bill Wolf replied with a definitive "yes."

The other side: Stambaugh said he doesn't believe the merger is necessary.

"I feel that the borough's debt isn't large enough that it needs to merge," said Stambaugh. "The savings aren't enough."

His wife, Susan Stambaugh, agreed.

"It means bigger government for us. And bigger doesn't mean better," said Stambaugh.

What's next?: Walker, who hosted the meeting, was pleased with the results.

But when asked if he thought increased resident pressure would cause the opposing council members to change their mind on the merger issue, he did not sound hopeful.

"Three have already said that they would not change their vote," Walker said, "But who knows?"

Highlights of Pennsylvania Economy League Report Concerning Merger Question- December 2007

1. Property taxes will be reduced from 2.9 mils down to 1.505 mils.
2. We already have joint Sewer Authority
3. We already have joint police force, which increases in cost every year.
4. We already have joint EMS
5. From 1990 to 2000 Township increased in population by 35.4%.
6. From 1990 to 2000 Mt Wolf Boro decreased in population by 2.1% .
7. All planning and zoning for Mt. Wolf Boro will be "grandfathered" into the township.
8. We cannot easily determine the boundary lines because of Mt. Wolf addresses.
9. We will be in a position to develop a common recreation board.
10. A merger will give us size and leverage to attract more business to the whole.
11. Merger will foster economic growth.
12. Merger will help control development.
13. The commonwealth is in support of municipal mergers.
14. There are un-recognized cultural and social factors.
15. It will help with dealing with the complexity of government entities.
16. It will offer more seamless governance.
17. It will help move toward professional management of the township as a whole.

Wolf-Man merger benefits overstated

**LESTER J.
JORDAN**

After reading the various articles and editorials published in the newspapers by reporters and editors alike, I feel compelled to offer some of my thoughts concerning the proposed merger of Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township.

As a borough tax payer, I am concerned by rising taxes. But the proposed merger is no guarantee that lower taxes are a sure thing. When all of this development needs to be serviced by the municipality, larger municipalities have greater tax diversity, but they are not necessarily efficient in providing needed services and are frequently not sensitive to their citizens.

As the region grows, government will require diversity and careful planning. Perhaps we should worry not quite as much about the approximate savings on lower municipal taxes, but instead worry about the ever-increasing school taxes. If something is not done soon by the state Legislature, every resident who owns a house will be proverbially renting that home from the school district.

Another concern I found wanting was lack of defined "purpose" in determining the future role or identity of the borough, if indeed the merger did occur. If you are to believe the articles in the newspapers, it has been suggested that the borough of Mount Wolf was a blight in the region — if not now, definitely in the future. There is no question, older towns and their basic fabric are challenged to maintain themselves within the context of a positive environment. It is to this objective that the council must address in practical ways to keep the community sound and alive.

There are many towns in Pennsylvania, as well as all across the United States, that have cared for themselves quite well, for the citizens have understood their historical significance and their sense of purpose as a timely community. This was accomplished in spite of the fact they cannot expand their tax base.

My fear therefore is based upon the sentiments expressed by those desiring the merger. For it leads me to believe the unique interests of the borough and its historical character will not be served in the future. Perhaps we as a community have not nurtured this dimension of our town with care.

Certainly, if East Manchester Township's expansion is solely tax driven, then the sense of "community" is compromised by wall-to-wall structures with little attention to design and positive development of the land. The township has been "developer driven," which is quite different than establishing space through community planning. Our whole county continues to suffer from the neglect of sensitive comprehensive planning, and putting traffic lights up every quarter mile doesn't seem to me to be effective in accomplishing any planning.

Much debate and large amounts of information have been gathered, processed and mulled over many times. So far, those who suggest a vote given on the "no" side was

simply a matter of personal feelings or interests — you could not be further from the truth.

As for the articles written by editors of various newspapers, your job is to report the news as it is covered and that has not always been accomplished without bias. You certainly are entitled to your opinions, but as it pertains to the proposed merger, we are not interested in your political diatribe, only on factual reporting.

Obviously there are many nuances to this issue that perhaps have not been clearly revealed in the discussions and the reporting of those discussions as well. While I respect the fact that many people have contributed their time, effort and ideas on the proposal for a merger between Mount Wolf Borough and East Manchester Township, as you can ascertain from my letter, I do not think a merger is in the best interest of the borough.

Lester J. Jordan is a Mount Wolf borough councilman.

'Don't need to fix us'

■ Mount Wolf councilors who voted against the merger say support was lacking.

By EUGENE PAIK
Daily Record/Sunday News

Homes occupy most of the land in the half-square-mile territory of Mount Wolf. There are two major industrial businesses in the borough — the New York Wire plant on Main Street and the Georgia Pacific plant between Maple and Main streets. Only a handful of retail shops are within its borders.

The borough's financial wellspring — its population — has steadily dropped since 1970, when it had about 1,800 people. In 2006, the U.S. Census estimated there were 1,344.

East Manchester Township, which surrounds most of Mount Wolf, is a different story.

At more than 17 square miles, it has room for job growth and the population is booming. It grew from about 1,784 residents in 1950 to an estimated 6,876 in 2006. It's home to farms as well as retail and industrial businesses.

On the surface, a merger between the borough and township could avert a seemingly bleak financial future for Mount Wolf. The borough will inevitably see tax hikes, given Mount Wolf's dwindling populace and lack of jobs and for growth.

Merge

Continued from 1A

With East Manchester Township leadership willing to cooperate, a merger seemed destined for November's ballot.

Last week, however, Mount Wolf's council voted 4-3 against the proposal and slammed the brakes on the merger effort.

Council members rejecting the plan said they had several reasons. There were concerns about being under-represented in the township's government and about the borough losing its identity.

But the overriding reason was a lack of demand or need for a merger, said council members Patrice Poet and Lester Jordan. Both voted against the proposal.

"I don't think that we're broken right now. I don't see the need to fix us," Poet said.

Mount Wolf Councilman Tom Brenner said he doesn't understand the rejection.

The merger could save the borough from financial problems and reduce property taxes without posing a big shock to residents, he said. The boundaries between the borough and township are already blurred, as some township residents believe they live in Mount Wolf, he said.

Jordan and Poet both recognized that taxes will increase and the call for a merger might return, but they said most Mount Wolf residents they spoke with were indifferent to the proposal.

"If the majority doesn't want to do it, there's no sense continuing on," Jordan said.

Poet said she fears the merger will disrupt the connection between the government and Mount Wolf residents. Residents can easily contact Mount Wolf officials and expect timely results. Another benefit of being autonomous is people can track where their money is going, she said.

"We're good at what we do because we have time to do it," Poet said.

Also, the borough is not in any financial danger, she said. The borough has low overhead costs and does not employ full-time workers.

Lester said tax savings touted in the proposal failed to generate excitement in the Mount Wolf residents with

MERGER

With the merger, property tax rates in Mount Wolf would drop from 2.90 mills to 1.505, which includes maintenance for fire hydrants and streetlights. Mount Wolf would no longer have its own government, but East Manchester Township's three-member board of supervisors would add two representatives from Mount Wolf for the transition. In 2011, the board would revert to three members.

Property tax rates in East Manchester Township would hold at 1.04 mills.

Rejected

On Feb. 12, Mount Wolf council voted 4-3 to reject the merger. Approvals by Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township would have led to public hearings on the proposal. The issue would have been placed on the ballot in November's general election.

East Manchester Township's board of supervisors has not voted on the merger.

What's next?

East Manchester Township supervisor David Naylor said the board will probably discuss the merger next month. Ron Walker, Mount Wolf council president, said council members can bring the proposal back for another vote. The next council meeting is March 11. Walker said the plan must be ready by the end of July to be eligible for the ballot.

whom he discussed the details. Had the merger been in effect in January 2006, borough residents would have saved nearly \$138 in taxes that year, according to a study prepared for the plan.

Perfect timing

Brenner said he hoped the merger issue would be decided in November's election, which features a presidential race and could draw a large and diverse group from both communities.

Walker said he's unsure if those in the borough support the plan. Many residents, he said, might not even know of the tax savings that would result from the merger. That's why it was important for the council to approve the merger, he said.

Brenner agreed. "They should be given the chance to be educated about the process and have the chance to vote," he said.

Jordan said there was no need to put it on the ballot because his constituents

weren't demanding it in the first place. Not every issue can be a community-wide vote, he said, and this one was not urgent enough to warrant an approval.

To Tom Wolf, the state's secretary of revenue and a Mount Wolf resident, the proposed merger is a once-in-a-lifetime chance. Mount Wolf's property taxes are on the rise, he said, while the township's taxes are stable for the moment.

"This is one moment in time where we're both at the same point," he said. "It's not going to last forever."

Spotty success rate

Merger efforts in Pennsylvania are rarely successful, said Rick Schuettler, deputy executive director for the Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities. Most are satisfied with a regionalized approach, in which municipalities share public services, he said.

"There's usually lots of talk (of mergers), but people generally don't want to give up their autonomy," he said.

A major sticking point for many merger proposals is that one side normally sees higher taxes to compensate for lower rates in the other, he said. What's surprising about the Mount Wolf merger, Schuettler said, is that the municipality that's supposed to have the most to lose if there is no merger is the one backing away.

Township supervisor David Naylor says the merger would help his township because problems from a blighted Mount Wolf could seep into the township.

"To me, personally, this was the right thing to do as a community as a whole," he said.

This isn't the first merger attempt for Mount Wolf to hit a snag. Almost 40 years ago, the borough considered a merger with Manchester.

John Eppard, then a York Haven resident in his early 20s, was a member of the organization charged with selecting a name for the merged municipality. Back then, the rivalry between the two boroughs ran deep and was unabashedly displayed at public meetings.

He said he sees a similar attitude with the reaction to the new proposal.

"Like Yogi Berra said, 'it's déjà vu all over again,'" said Eppard, who now lives in Manchester Township.

The return of Wolf-Man?

Municipal merger could be revived if people demand it.

Wolf-Man is not dead. No, that's not a promotional blurb for some schlock horror flick. But it does provide an apt metaphor.

**OUR
OPINION**

Everyone knows it takes a silver bullet to kill a werewolf. And Wolf-Man — in this case, a friendly creature in the mold of Michael J. Fox's "Teen Wolf" — has so far dodged a deadly shot. He has, however, suffered some grave political wounds.

Wolf-Man is the nickname some have given to a proposed merger of Mount Wolf borough and East Manchester Township.

The first reel of this municipal drama ended with Wolf-Man laid out by a 4-3 Mount Wolf Borough Council vote not to put the merger proposal referendum on the November ballot.

Things looked grim. But the camera zoomed in on a hairy paw twitching, showing signs of life. Now we can only hope this flick has a happy ending rather than a horrific missed opportunity on the part of borough officials.

A Pennsylvania Economy League study showed that Mount Wolf residents could actually see a decrease in local taxes in a merged entity — with no loss of public services.

The folks in East Manchester Township wouldn't get a tax cut out of the deal. But their supervisors were willing to take on the landlocked borough in what could prove to be a historic — and, we hope, trend-setting — move toward regionalization in this Balkanized state of Transylvania... oops, Pennsylvania.

Mount Wolf council mem-

IF YOU GO

Find out more about the Pennsylvania Economy League's report on a proposed merger between Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Eagle Fire Company No. 1 of Mount Wolf, 54 Center St.

bers said no. They weren't willing to let citizens decide through a referendum whether they want a tax-cut producing merger.

Why?

Some council members said they weren't hearing a great demand from citizens to merge. Why do it if people weren't asking for it, they asked.

But maybe people weren't demanding it because they didn't know much about it. That seemed to be the case at a recent meeting where people packed the town hall wondering about the merger idea. Some said they'd like to know more and said they didn't think officials did a very good job of getting the word out.

Well, maybe that will change Thursday evening, when another meeting will be held to discuss the merger proposal.

Some borough officials have said the merger is not completely dead. If the people demand it, they'll reconsider.

Let's hope both of those things happen. This merger makes so much sense — and could be an inspiration for similar municipal pairings across the county — that it would be a shame to see it die.

So come out Thursday night, villagers. Learn more about this sensible proposal — and then howl for a vote.

■ Mount Wolf council rejects proposal 4-3.

A proposed merger between Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township that some say will lower property taxes in Mount Wolf may have been derailed by a recent rejection by the borough's council.

The proposal was rejected last week in a 4-3 vote — a decision that blocks further progress in the merger effort.

Council members Martha Hassler, Lester Jordan, Patrice Poet and Ronald Witmer voted against the plan at the council's Feb. 12 meeting.

"I don't think we're ready for it yet," Witmer said Monday night.

He said he's concerned the merger means less representation for Mount Wolf and leaves open the possibility of the township overruling the wishes of borough residents.

Under the merger plan, Mount Wolf would be recognized as a village within the township.

During the transition period, East Manchester Township's board of supervisors would temporarily become larger with the addition of two members from the borough.

The board would revert back to three members in 2011.

Tax savings touted by merger advocates are also being overstated, Witmer said.

Proposal supporters say that combining the municipalities will result in lower property taxes in Mount Wolf.

The tax rate would drop from 2.90 mills to 1.505 mills while the township millage rate would remain at 1.04.

The extra money paid by Mount Wolf would be used to maintain its fire hydrants and streetlights.

Councilman Tom Brenner said Monday that a merger may be the final hope for the borough's finances.

Mount Wolf, he said, has no room to grow and has few businesses to make up for dwindling property tax revenues.

The borough's population shrank by 2.1 percent from 1990 to 2000, according to a merger report by the Pennsylvania Economy League.

"We're almost in a position in Mount Wolf where our reserve funds are gone," Brenner said.

Merger supporters say that the two municipalities are already linked in some respects, with both sharing a sewer authority, police force and emergency management services.

Consolidation will foster economic development in the area and make local government more efficient, they say.

In order for the issue to go any further, both Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township must endorse the proposal.

That deal would launch a series of public informational hearings and allow lawyers from the municipalities to write a final plan, which would appear on ballots in November's election.

Merger advocates had hoped to have it on the ballot by November to take advantage of a high turnout expected for the presidential race.

The proposal, which once included Manchester, could be brought back at the March 11 meeting of Mount Wolf's council.

The proposal must be ready by July to be listed on the ballot.

Merger still hot-button topic

■ Some Mount Wolf residents want the question on the ballot.

By TERESA ANN BOECKEL
Daily Record/Sunday News

Some Mount Wolf residents asked at an informational meeting Thursday night how the town could get a proposed merger with East Manchester Township on the ballot.

The Mount Wolf council voted 4-3 last month not to move forward with the merger.

"I would like to see it get on the ballot where everybody in the borough would have a voice — not just seven people," resident Bill Wolf said after the meeting.

Ron Walker, council president and chairman of the merger committee, said residents need to talk to council members personally or attend meetings to encourage them to change their vote.

Representatives of the Pennsylvania Economy League summarized a more than 80-page report on the merger and answered residents questions, such as whether anything would

change with the post office.

Many council members didn't attend the meeting at the fire hall in the borough. Some pointed out that it wasn't a borough-sanctioned meeting, and the council already had decided to end the merger process.

"It's over. They lost 4-3," council member Lester Jordan said earlier Thursday. "At this point, there's no additional information that's going to change my mind."

Some who attended the informational meeting Thursday said they didn't feel that merger is worth it at this point.

Borough tax collector Charles Stambaugh said he took each household and multiplied it by the new millage rate. Then he subtracted it from what they pay now.

"I came out with averages less than they did," he said. "For example, my house, I... only save \$85."

The only debt Mount Wolf has is on buildings, and the borough expects to have more than \$77,000 in surplus at the end of the year.

"This is not the time for merger," Stambaugh said.

East Manchester Township supervisors haven't voted on the merger, which some people have questioned.

ON THE WEB

An 88-page report on a possible merger between Mount Wolf and East Manchester Township is available at www.peicentral.org/mergerstudy.pdf. The next Mount Wolf council meeting is at 7 p.m. April 8.

Chairman supervisor Steven Gross Jr. said Thursday that the board did not vote on it because they knew it was a sensitive subject for the borough.

"We did not want to put the added stress of us voting in favor of it on Mount Wolf borough," he said. "They need to make this decision on their own. ... You can't go into a marriage with a shotgun."

Jordan called that a "cop-out." He said the supervisors didn't vote because they wanted to see what Mount Wolf would do first.

"If this is so important, why didn't they vote on it?" Jordan said.

Gross said it isn't a cop-out.

"We feel it's such a big issue that it needs to go to the residents," he said. "Once in a great while as an elected official, some issues come up that need to go to the public for a vote, and this is one of those."