

Bordentown Twp. wins grant to study police merger

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BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP - Bordentown Township will receive a \$33,000 state grant to study the feasibility of merging police services with Bordentown City, a tiny riverfront municipality ringed by the township.

The money was part of \$162,556 in shared-services grants awarded to six local governments by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the agency said yesterday.

"We're in a climate of pressure for consolidation," said William Morelli, mayor of Bordentown Township. "The state sees that as an answer to burdensome property taxes. . . . It seems to make sense where possible to get an economy of scale going."

The two Bordentowns in Burlington County already share a courthouse and emergency-management services, and the township plans to put a referendum question on the ballot in November asking residents how they feel about merging the towns altogether, Morelli said.

Bordentown Township, population 10,000, is nine square miles. By land, it surrounds two riverfront communities: the one-square-mile Bordentown City, population 4,000, and even tinier Fieldsboro, which Morelli said was not involved in the shared-services discussions.

Frank Nucera Jr., the township's police chief, said that his department of 22 full-time officers needed a few more, and that it was possible a merger "between both agencies may support enough men to cover both municipalities efficiently."

Bordentown City has 12 full-time officers, Police Chief Matthew Simmons said. He said he was concerned, however, whether the community under one police department would "receive the same quality service that we've provided them over the years."

Simmons added: "My main concern is sometimes bigger is not always better, but if it's going to save taxpayers money, it's something to look into and that's what we're doing. At this point nothing's set in stone."

Preliminary discussions for Medford Township to provide police services for Medford Lakes, the tiny borough it surrounds, have generated opposition from many borough residents who contend the move would result in less community-oriented service.

Also receiving a grant under the Sharing Available Resources Efficiently program was Camden County, which is studying its voice and data systems to determine the feasibility of upgrading to an over-the-Internet system, officials said.

The change could save hundreds of thousands of dollars in standard phone charges, deputy county administrator James Rhodes said.

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