

Morristown Eyes Sharing Services With Morris Twp.

Taking 'baby steps,' council OKs study of joint firefighting, DPW operations

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Minhaj Hassan

Staff Writer

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MORRISTOWN -- The town council has approved studying shared services with Morris Township on public works and firefighting operations.

The go-ahead came late Tuesday night, after council members heard a presentation from Linda Murphy, the county's shared services coordinator.

Everyone voted in favor of the resolutions except Councilman Anthony Cattano, who was absent, spending time with his family to await the birth of a grandson.

"We need to take baby steps by looking at whether sharing services can save money before taking on the mammoth task of merging towns," council President John Cryan said.

Mayor Donald Cresitello described the adopted resolutions as "informal" requests to have Morris Township officials sit down with Morristown officials to discuss sharing various municipal services.

Cresitello has said he prefers the two municipalities merge. However, Morris Township officials have stated that they are against merging.

Morris Township officials welcomed the town's willingness to look into sharing municipal services.

"This township wants discussions," Mayor Scott Rosenbush said.

"We are interested in shared services," Committeeman Jeffrey Grayzel said. "There should be no doubt about our interest in proceeding. All you need to do is to say 'hello.'"

Murphy said the next step is for officials from both municipalities to discuss the scope of shared services. Representatives from both teams, usually consisting of an administrator and elected officials, will engage in those discussions.

She cautioned both municipalities to "prioritize" the services they'd like to consolidate, making sure the quality remains strong.

Once they determine a plan on how many people and which services will be affected, the next step is to apply for a Sharing Available Resources Effectively grant, which is awarded by the state Department of Community Affairs.

Typically the grants are \$20,000 for each study, she said, adding she would file for the grant if approached by the two municipalities.

The speed these things can be completed is dependent on the municipalities, Murphy said. "It's all in their hands," she said.

According to Morristown Administrator Michael Rogers, the town Department of Public Works has about 27 employees and a \$3.1 million annual budget.

The town's fire department, Rogers said, has some 31 firefighters and an annual spending plan of \$3.2 million.

James Stoia, superintendent of the township DPW, said his department has approximately 50 employees.

The budget and number of employees in the township fire department were not immediately available.

Rogers said on Wednesday he is still working on scheduling a meeting with Morris Township Administrator Fred Rossi, due to scheduling conflicts.

Two other resolutions on the town's agenda called for a feasibility study on police operations and a study on public recreation services. The council tabled the vote on police services, and the recreation operations was voted down.

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