

“8th DRAFT” of a LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION PLAN

The “*Government Structure and Legal Issues*” sub-committee of the *Shenango Valley Intergovernmental Study Committee*, hereby respectfully submit to the full committee, for your consideration, review and debate -- ***a draft plan for the consolidation of the study area’s five (5) participating municipalities***; namely Sharon, Hermitage, Farrell, Sharpsville and/or Wheatland -- with all of the same presently being contiguous, separate local governments that collectively comprise the *Shenango Valley regional area* of Mercer County, western Pennsylvania.

Consolidation Plan Objective:

To ***approve***, through a joint referendum and ballot issue, the proposed consolidation of the study area’s five (5) participating municipalities -- into a new, single, larger, more politically powerful, more productive, more efficient, and much more cost effective “***Home Rule***” ***local government***; and to further accomplish the same while still retaining the current individual municipal charm and residential ambiance. . . while also maintaining, ***and only enhancing***, the present cultural and ethnic integrity of each municipality’s traditional neighborhoods -- and to do so without any reduction in established residential real estate and housing values, that presently exist within the individual municipalities.

Consolidation Plan Implementation:

Writing the Ballot Question for consideration of the “Consolidation Referendum”.

After each of the five (5) existing governing bodies (Sharon City Council, Farrell City Council, Hermitage Board of Commissioners, Sharpsville Borough Council and Wheatland Borough Council) have reviewed and approved the proposed consolidation plan... the Shenango Valley Intergovernmental Study Committee would then write and further publicly endorse a ***ballot question*** that would allow for the residents of each of the five (5) participating municipalities to vote the issue of consolidating into a single, larger “***Home Rule***” ***municipality***. It should be further understood that if any governing body, representing the five (5) participating municipalities, votes to reject the initial “consolidation plan” -- then the duly appointed sub-committees of the Shenango Valley Intergovernmental Study Committee shall be required to reconvene and expediently put forth an alternate consolidation plan; the same to be reconsidered by those governing bodies who initially voted in favor of municipal consolidation and who further desire that the consolidation issue itself, be brought forth to a “public” referendum vote.

Important Structural Components of the newly Consolidated “Home Rule” Municipality.

It is paramount and vitally important that the current and traditional names, which are presently assigned to each of the existing local governmental units (Sharon, Hermitage, Farrell, Sharpsville and/or Wheatland) be retained and continue to be utilized as identifiers in the formation of separate and distinct “DISTRICTS” within the newly created local government; and further that these said districts would collectively comprise -- and in-turn, set the outer boundary configuration for the newly consolidated “***Home Rule***” ***Municipality***. *(for discussion purposes only. . . let us call the newly consolidated municipality the City of Shenango!)*

Furthermore, *each separate and distinct “District”*-- that would retain the name of its former municipal government (Sharon, Hermitage, Farrell, Sharpsville and/or Wheatland) shall continue to be voiced, printed and predominately utilized *as a “Local” identifier* in all verbal dialogue, deliberations and conversations, as well as, all local and regional postal services/zip codes, mapping and all printed/electronic media.

The name of the newly consolidated *“Home Rule Municipality”* (City of Shenango) will be utilized *as the required and formal identifier* at all *“State”* and *“Federal”* levels.

[*Note: It is imperative that the current municipal names be retained and utilized -- as the way to locally identify the various “Districts” comprising the newly consolidated municipality.* Retaining the former municipal names should substantially soften any *misconceptions* that residents may formulate in reaction to the municipal consolidation; and help to address any citizen concerns emanating from the “uncertainties of change”. This procedure should also provide for a much better understanding of the *real uncertainties* that may occur as a result of instituting new and revised operating procedures in the delivery of “non-duplicating” consolidated governmental services-- i.e. city administration, tax collections, police services, public works scheduling, etc. It must be emphasized, that since this consolidation effort shall only affect the local municipal governments within the region -- it is therefore, vitally important to recognize the former municipal names as *“non-taxing, separate and distinct districts”* within the newly consolidated city. This will most certainly eliminate any potential resident confusion, as it may relate to what school district they shall continue to financially support; and to which school district they shall also continue to send their children to be educated. *Furthermore, and more importantly, the retention of the former municipal names shall allow, when desired, for the establishment of separate and distinct “service districts” within the new consolidated city -- i.e. separate fire service districts, water/sewer service districts, etc.* Additionally, the retention of the former municipal names shall further assure the continuation of an established and desired life-style; as well as, perpetuate and preserve the overall charm and desired ambiance of each former municipality. This procedure shall further enhance and promote the cultural and ethnic integrity of the newly established districts; while more importantly, provide for the retention of current real estate values within the former neighborhoods, that would now comprise the new City of Shenango.]

The Necessity of Providing STATE (and Federal) Financial Assistance to the newly Consolidated “Home Rule” Municipality.

A very, very important (if not a required necessity) for achieving a successful consolidation -- is that the State Government in Harrisburg, become a willing and active partner in this overall process. If the State officials truly believe that the future turn-around of this region, into a once-again vibrant and productive growth area, would depend and hinge upon intergovernmental cooperation and/or local government consolidation; then these same State officials must be willing to commit and provide the required millions of State grant dollars and financial assistance that would be needed to achieve that end.

Should the Intergovernmental Study Committee agree to recommend a formal local governmental consolidation -- then the first order of business (before any actual referendum vote takes place) is to convene a series of meetings between a **“working committee”** of local consolidation officials; the same to expediently meet with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s **newly elected Governor** and his top **departmental heads from the DCED, DCNR, PennDOT, etc.**; as well as, **State Senator Bob Robbins** and **State Representative Mike Gruitza** -- with the sole purpose being the discussion and further **obtainment of a firm commitment from the State for a defined “Municipal Consolidation - Financial Aid Package”** -- as well as, securing any available implementation **technical support and assistance.**

Note: The local officials appointed to the above said “working committee” should request from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a **“Municipal Consolidation - Financial Aid Package”** that includes the following:

- ☺ **State financial grant-in-aid to provide for desperately needed new and renovated infrastructure improvements.**
- ☺ **State approval for a needed Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) expansion, that would include funding for needed access improvements.**
- ☺ **State grant-in-aid to facilitate the merger/consolidation and re-organization of the new City of Shenango’s departmental services -- into a single, more “efficient” and “responsive” consolidated administrative unit; as well as, providing for one consolidated “full-time” police department; “coordination” of existing paid and volunteer fire departments operating within designated fire protection service districts; one unified public works/street department; one consolidated sewage/water pollution control department; one newly merged finance and tax collection department; one combined, non- competitive community and economic development department; one consolidated planning/zoning department; and one, single consolidated parks and recreation department; etc.**

- ☺ ***State/Federal assurances that would guarantee providing more Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to the new City of Shenango, than was collectively provided to the former individual municipalities.***

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Elected Governmental Representation for the newly Consolidated “Home Rule” Municipality.

In an effort to assure that *all citizens receive an “equitable” elected representation* -- it is proposed that the City of Shenango’s required “Home Rule Charter” be written in such a manner as to provide for a ***(4) four year “interim” Shenango City Council, the same consisting of up to (11) eleven (part-time) members (all serving 4-year terms) – with one (1) City Council representative elected from each of the city’s five (5) newly designated “districts”; and six (6) City Council Representatives elected “at large” throughout the entire City of Shenango.***

After the designated election upon which the consolidation referendum issue is approved; and within 7-days following the date of the next general election, whereby the eleven (11) members of the Shenango City Council shall be duly elected--said city council members shall meet in special ***“organization session”*** whereby said council members shall caucus and then move to elect one city council member to fill the position of ***Mayor and President of Council***, with said appointment being for a 2-year term. The duly appointed Mayor and President of Council shall then confer with all members of city council and at his/her discretion, make all other required governmental committee appointments and conduct other organizational duties as deemed appropriate and necessary.

Furthermore, the City of Shenango’s Home Rule Charter shall specify that ***within 3-years following the formal seating of the “initial” and “interim” Shenango City Council***, said city council members shall approve and implement a required ***“reapportionment plan”*** -- ***whereby the City of Shenango shall be equally divided into ten (10) wards, each of the same representing approximately 4,400 citizens*** and further designated utilizing the most current U.S. census tracks. The Home Rule Charter shall then specify that at the next appropriate primary and general election, ***an 11-member (part-time) Shenango City Council shall be duly elected -- with one (1) City Council representative elected from each of the ten (10) established “wards”; and one (1) City Council representative elected “at large” throughout the entire City of Shenango. The successful at large City Council representative shall serve a 4-year term and retain the title and responsibility of Mayor and President of Council. The ten (10) City Council representatives elected from each of the designated wards, shall serve 4-year staggered terms.***

(In addition to the above, a full-time ***“City Treasurer”*** shall be elected at-large, also serving a 4-year term)

Appointment of Administrative and Operational Personnel for the newly Consolidated (Council/Manager) “Home Rule” Municipality.

In an effort to assure that all citizens and taxpayers of the City of Shenango continue to receive a **“responsive”** and **“efficient”** delivery of local governmental services -- it is recommended that this newly created “Home Rule” Municipality be administered and operated by a **professional, full-time City Manager**, who shall be hired and serve at the pleasure of the majority of Mayor and City Council members.

After the designated general election, whereby all members of the “initial” and “interim” Shenango City Council are duly elected, and before December 31st of that same year -- city council members shall be required to meet in special session, **for the purpose of temporarily appointing and/or permanently hiring all administrative personnel designated in the City of Shenango’s approved “Administrative Code” -- the same drafted by a duly appointed “consolidation transition team”**. Furthermore, said “transition team” shall recommend candidates for the position of City Manager and all other designated city department heads, with Shenango City Council having sole discretion in the final selection and hiring of the City Manager.

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Furthermore, after consideration of the transition team’s staffing recommendations -- the **City Manager**, being the city’s chief administrative official, shall be empowered to hire and/or fire (with the concurrence of Mayor and Council) all other designated full-time city department heads i.e. *Assistant Manager & Director of Governmental Services; Director of Finance & Tax Collections; Director of Community & Economic Development; Director of Planning & Zoning; Police Chief; Fire Service Coordinator; Superintendent of the Public Works/Street Department; Superintendent of the Sewage/Waste Water Treatment Department; Director of Parks & Recreation*; as well as the creation of a new **“Ombudsman”** position, working under the direct oversight of the City Manager.

Furthermore, after consideration of the transition team’s staffing recommendations -- each **“department head”** shall then recommend to the City Manager the employment and deployment of all other subordinate employees and staff -- with the City Manager ultimately being responsible for their hiring and/or firing.

[Note: all existing full-time municipal employees currently employed by any of the five (5) former local governments, as well as, their union representation -- shall be **“grandfathered”** and be assured a job, at the same or higher salary/wages, within the newly consolidated municipality. **Furthermore, any financial savings anticipated from reductions (terminations) in personnel, that could be achieved as a result of the municipal consolidation -- must wait and take place only through normal attrition, retirement, and/or malfeasance.**]

Transition from five (5) individual municipalities into a new Consolidated “Home Rule” Municipality.

The municipal consolidation shall be approved upon the **“unanimous approval”** of all participating municipalities included in the consolidation referendum issue--the same being determined by a majority number of registered voters casting a **“yes”** vote in favor of the consolidation ballot question. Within

30-days after the unanimous approval of the consolidation referendum, a “**Consolidation Transition Team**” shall be appointed by the governing bodies of the participating municipalities; the same consisting of up to eleven (11) members and reflecting the same configuration and representation make-up as the proposed Shenango City Council. This said *transition team* shall be responsible for drafting and preparing the required City of Shenango’s “**Administrative Code**”-- while further responsible for the preparation of a “**Transition Plan**”-- that shall include recommended employee staffing for each designated city department; as well as, the most efficient utilization and deployment of all existing municipally owned real property, buildings and equipment. The work of the consolidation transition team shall be completed on or before the second, full annual primary and general election cycle, that follows the consolidation referendum approval.

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Anticipated “Benefits” to be derived from a Municipal Consolidation!

- 1) To provide for a more “*efficient*” and much more “*cost effective*” operating municipality; that could provide for ***more and better local governmental services, while literally saving millions of tax dollars annually***, through the elimination of costly duplicating municipal services. It should be realized that a consolidation of the five (5) local governments comprising the Shenango Valley regional area -- could provide for the ***elimination*** of up to four (4) duplicating governmental administrations; four (4) duplicating finance/tax collection departments; three (3) duplicating police departments; four (4) duplicating public works/street departments; two (2) duplicating sewage/waste water treatment departments; as well as, the elimination of many other required, but redundant municipal services.
- 2) To provide for a more “*desirable*” and “*flexible*” ***Home Rule Municipality*** -- whereby the ***governmental structure itself***, as well as, the ***type and amount of local taxation*** could be determined and set by ***our own “local” elected officials***; which in-turn, could further provide the means to hopefully stabilize or reverse the historic trend of escalating local “*real estate*” taxes. It should be noted, that through the crafting of a new Home Rule Charter -- the unpopular reliance upon property taxes could be reduced or replaced with a more equitable “*local wage tax*”, the same to be collected from **all *employed wage earners*** residing within the newly consolidated city. Also, it should be further noted, that utilizing wage tax collections as the primary source of local tax revenues within the new consolidated city -- ***would inturn, provide for much needed tax relief to many of the City of Shenango’s senior residents. Wage taxes are exempt from Social Security and many other types of pension and retirement income!***
- 3) To provide for a desperately needed “*infusion*” of ***State and Federal grant-in-aid*** -- ***the***

same to be utilized to provide for new and needed infrastructure improvements; as well as, funding and technical assistance to facilitate the actual merger and re-organization of the new City of Shenango's departmental services.

- 4) To provide for a single, more **“responsive”** local government that would maintain and enhance ***the current residential charm, ambiance, and integrity of our existing neighborhoods -- while also retaining, and eventually increasing, the real estate/housing values*** that presently exist within each individual municipality.
- 5) To provide for a much more **“politically powerful”** and **“influential”** local government, that would demand the attention of our State and Federal governmental officials and agencies; while in-turn, ***securing new and additional funding sources, while also hopefully collecting a larger share of available and existing grant-in-aid*** i.e. KOZ, CDBG, HUD, et al.
- 6) To provide a **“guarantee”** to all existing full-time ***municipal employees*** (including the union representation of their choice) who are currently employed by any of the five (5) former local governments, that they shall be **“grandfathered”** and be assured a job, at the same or higher salary/wages, within the newly consolidated municipality. Furthermore, any operational savings anticipated from reductions in personnel (terminations) that could be achieved as a result of the local governments consolidating must wait and take place only through normal attrition, retirement and/or malfeasance.

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- 7) To provide for up to an ***11-member “interim” Shenango City Council*** -- with one (1) council member elected from each of the city's five (5) designated **“districts”** and six (6) council members elected **“at large”** throughout the entire City of Shenango. The make-up of the new city council would thereby consist of citizens that reside within each established “district” (***later from within the ten (10) designated “wards”***) of the newly created City of Shenango; thus, helping to assure that no one area within the city gets ignored or further, is shown any unfair and/or preferential treatment.

***Respectfully submitted...the sub-committee on
“Government Structure and Legal Issues”***

***James A. DeCapua, Sub-committee Chairman
William Morocco, Farrell Mayor
Pat White, Hermitage Commissioner***

*Thomas Lally, Sharpsville Councilman
Carl Eirich, Sharon (educator)*

*Legal assistance by . . .
William Madden, Sharon & Wheatland Solicitor
Stephen Mirizio, Farrell Solicitor
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Unlike pages 1 through 7. . . the following commentary is that of sub-committee chairman James A. DeCapua -- and not necessarily the opinion of all other members on the sub-committee for Government Structures and Legal Issues.

Anticipated “Disadvantages” to be derived from a Municipal Consolidation!

NONE!!

at least none that I can think of . . .

. . . and furthermore, if anyone should ever doubt the necessity for us to do something, then simply remind them of this region’s past 25-year history; the same that has seen the irreplaceable

and staggering loss of thousands, upon thousands of **“bread and butter jobs”** -- that were once available at local industrial employers, such as the Westinghouse, Sharon Steel, GATX, Malleable, National Castings, Shenango Inc., U.S. Steel Products, Bessemer Railroad, Chicago Bridge & Iron, etc; and now more recently Cooper Energy Services, Trinity Industries, Sharpsville Quality Products, Damascus Tube, Werner Ladder, Oxford Automotive, as well as, the cold draw division of Wheatland Tube. Clearly, the loss of an industrial tax base, to the magnitude of the above listed companies, cannot continue to be dismissed as a short-term or temporary local economic set-back -- while further holding on to an unrealistic belief that (without a new “consolidated” action plan) prosperity will be right around the corner.

In closing, let me simply say ***that now is the time for all good men (and women) to come to the aid of their community -- it is also the time for us to “wake-up” and embrace the apparent necessity for change!! We must now come to the realization that a municipal consolidation is not to be dreaded or feared as being the end to a desired life-style -- but however, must be viewed as the catalyst for a new beginning in the restoration of our region, into a “treasured community” that we all want to live and raise our families!!***

P.S. J.A.D. footnotes:

After more than 3-years and countless hours of study and deliberation -- I feel that this issue of Shenango Valley municipal consolidation can best be framed by paraphrasing two (2) very appropriate proverbial expressions. I truly believe that each of the five (5) Shenango Valley municipalities are only as strong as their collective weakest link; while I further believe that “united” the Shenango Valley shall prosper and stand -- but remaining “divided”, the region shall continue to deteriorate and fall.