

REPORT
OF
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STREETS AND TRAFFIC SIGNALS
TO THE
SHENANGO VALLEY INTERGOVERNMENTAL STUDY COMMITTEE

MEMBERS

Joseph Augustine	City of Hermitage
James DeCapua	Mercer County Regional Council of Governments
George Gerhart	City of Sharon
LaVon Saternow	City of Farrell
Thomas Stanton	Borough of Wheatland
Thomas Tulip	Pennsylvania Economy League
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ADVISORS

Street Department Supervisors:

Dale Bucher	Borough of Sharpsville
John Cave	City of Sharon
Keith Klamer	City of Hermitage
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Others:

Donald Blakesley	Mercer County Regional Planning Commission
Daniel Gracenin	Mercer County Regional Planning Commission

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OVERVIEW

The charge to the subcommittee was to project a vision of an efficient and cost effective service being provided under a single municipal government for the five municipalities under the scope of the study, ensuring that the current level of service will be maintained or improved for all. If such an efficient and cost effective operation could not be envisioned, the committee was charged to offer recommendations for shared services or cooperative activities that could result in improvements and savings.

PROCEDURE

The subcommittee involved itself in a variety of activities. Meetings were conducted of the subcommittee; correspondence requesting information was sent to the streets department supervisors of the five municipalities; meetings were conducted jointly with the subcommittee members, the supervisors, and other advisory personnel; written correspondence and telephone discussions were initiated with other cities in Pennsylvania with a similar size population to the potential number if the five municipalities were to consolidate; and the information and data obtained from returned correspondence, discussions, and municipal reports on staffing patterns, budgets, equipment, and operations was analyzed and discussed.

Throughout the process, the subcommittee and the advisory personnel were in a dialogue of sharing suggestions for consideration. The sincere interest and extremely helpful participation and assistance of all of the persons involved in this endeavor is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

PRESENT SITUATION

The municipalities of Farrell, Hermitage, Sharon, Sharpsville, and Wheatland each have a streets department with different distances of road miles to maintain, various responsibilities (some of which are directly related to the maintenance of streets and some not at all so related), and different numbers of employees.

The primary responsibility of all of the departments is to provide year round repair of streets, cleaning of storm water catch basins, sweeping of the streets, installation and repair of street signs and pavement markings, some ditching, right of way mowing, and winter snow and ice removal. Additional responsibilities include, as needed, assistance with removal of downed trees, removal of bulk residential trash items not removed by the refuse contractor, and cleaning of storm sewers. Often the streets department is the “catch all” arm of overall municipal upkeep

While each of the streets departments’ primary role is the maintenance of streets, alleys, and traffic signals, employees in some of the municipalities also are assigned to other departments either on a regular basis or as needs arise. The most prominent examples of that are in Farrell, where some streets department employees are assigned to respond to fire alarms, and in Sharpsville, where some employees are assigned part-time in the streets department and part-time in the water plant.

Major paving projects are performed by private contractors. Minor patching and tar and chip operations are performed by municipal personnel or jointly with private companies. Traffic signals are maintained by a private firm. Through the Council of Governments there is some joint purchasing of supplies, use of a sewer camera and jet, and repair of police cruisers by COG bus mechanics.

ROAD MILES:

The total distance of road miles (not lane miles and not state maintained roads) within the five municipality area is 183.09, which is distributed as follows:

Farrell	23.92
Hermitage	81.17
Sharon	54.69
Sharpsville	17.48
Wheatland	5.83

EMPLOYEES:

Employees whose responsibilities are fully with streets total 36 full-time and 8 part-time. The 6 employees in Sharpsville work full-time for the borough but spend approximately one-half of their time in the water and sewer department (as Sharpsville maintains its own water plant).

	Full-time	Part-time	
Farrell	4	1	2 FT are also fire fighters
Hermitage	18	0	(includes 1 clerical)
Sharon	12	1	
Sharpsville	0	6	Duties split with water plant
Wheatland	2	0	

The streets superintendents are directly involved in the on-site work of their departments and are integral members of the work crews (in addition to their planning and budgetary responsibilities).

Most of the employees are qualified operators of heavy equipment and trucks. The others are small equipment operators and general laborers. Each department has at least one employee who serves as a mechanic, although not necessarily exclusively.

EXPENDITURES

In 2001, the municipalities expended a total of \$4,364,464 for the general services of their departments, including salaries and benefits, street and alley paving, snow and ice removal, contracted services, equipment, traffic signs, electricity, street lighting, and vehicle and small equipment repairs.

Farrell	\$ 456,055
Hermitage	2,253,683
Sharon	1,152,562
Sharpsville	421,306
Wheatland	80,858

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER CITIES OF SIMILAR SIZE

	“Shenango”	Lancaster	Wilkes-Barre	York
Road miles	183	230	169	150
Employees	39	22	?	12
Salaries	\$1,654,877	\$ 598,780	\$?	\$?

Note: It is difficult to precisely compare data with other cities due to differences in the scope of responsibilities assigned to the streets departments and differences in reporting budget expenditures. For example, eight of Lancaster’s employees work full-time only cleaning streets and parking lots, the levels of responsibility for maintenance of equipment and vehicles vary among the cities, and most local municipalities do not have a clerical employee dedicated to the streets department. The number of employees is not a factor of road miles.

EQUIPMENT

The combined inventory of vehicles and equipment includes the following:

Dump trucks (10 tons+)	19	Backhoes	7
Dump trucks (1-9 tons)	12	Sweepers	5
Utility trucks	6	Brush hogs	2
Bucket truck	1	Sewer jets	3
Automobiles	3	Rollers	5
		Air compressors	2
Mowers – assortment of tractors and mowers			
Numerous small tools			

FACILITIES

Garages	6	Parking lots (public)	2
Storage lots	1	Parking garage	1

TRAFFIC SIGNALS

84 controllers: Farrell	6	Sharpsville	1
Hermitage	22	Wheatland	2
Sharon	53		

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES UNDER A SINGLE GOVERNMENT

Administrative Structure:

The scope of responsibilities of one streets department under a single consolidated government would remain the same as currently assigned. The employees in place at the time of consolidation would retain their employment, although some changes in organizational structure and in the responsibilities of some employees would occur.

The streets department could be aligned with other municipal services under a single department of public works. Responsibilities of the department of public works in that new structure could include streets and fleet maintenance; waste water treatment; sanitary sewer maintenance; engineering; code enforcement; buildings, grounds, and electrical maintenance; environmental services (refuse collection and recycling); and recreation and parks.

Employees:

The work of the present employees in the five municipalities is excellent. The mix of job skills currently in place seems to be appropriate. Some municipalities would like to have more heavy equipment operators; others seem to be sufficiently staffed. In the future, more part-time and seasonal employees could be used on an as needed basis, and some operations (such as general grounds keeping, open field grass cutting, street painting, some snow and ice removal, and some vehicle maintenance) could be contracted out more to private providers in order to save municipal funds.

It appears that the streets departments are used as a catch all service to perform undesignated assignments such as holiday decorating, residential bulk trash removal, and debris removal. Thus, further analysis is needed of miscellaneous tasks and the assignment of the responsibility for accomplishing them.

While the optimum number of employees in a consolidated department has not been determined, the personnel levels of several cities in Pennsylvania with more road miles seem to indicate that the current level of service and more can be accomplished with fewer employees. It is envisioned that the total number of employees necessary for optimum service eventually could decrease due to there not being a need for some duplicated positions such as department supervisor.

A consolidated, and therefore larger, department would be able to provide normal services during more than eight hours per day without necessarily spending large amounts of overtime wages by running two shifts during periods of longer sunlight and good weather.

Additionally, the clerical functions currently performed to some extent in each municipality by employees outside of the department could be performed by one in the new combined department. Those other clerical employees could be available to assist other departments more fully.

Equipment:

The inventory of major items of equipment and vehicles seems to be sufficient. However, the ages of many of the vehicles and major items of equipment are such that many will need to be replaced in the near future. Individually, the municipalities do not have cash or reserves on hand to fully satisfy those impending needs.

Current needs and replacement costs are as follows:

Farrell:

Sweeper (12 years old)	\$100,000.
Catch basin cleaner (26 years old)	80,000.
Sewer jet (26 years old)	80,000.
Dump truck w/plow and spreader (19 years old)	60,000.
Dump truck [1 ton] (19 years old)	38,000.
Wood chipper	24,000.
Tractor [grass cutting] (13 years old)	<u>16,000.</u>
	\$398,000.

Hermitage:

Rubber tire front loader	\$200,000.
Back hoe	65,000.
Dump truck [1 ton] w/plow and spreader	90,000.
Mower	<u>65,000.</u>
	\$420,000.

Sharon:

Sewer vacuum truck	\$130,000.
Back hoe and jack hammer	68,300.
Dump truck w/plow and spreader	85,000.
4 Dump trucks [1 ton] w/ plow and spreader	160,000.
Roller	40,000.
Small sweeper	20,000.
Portable sewer jet	20,000.
Portable generator for sign truck	2,500.
Camera locator for sewers	<u>5,000.</u>
	\$430,800.

Sharpsville:

Street sweeper	\$150,000.
Water truck	50,000.
Bucket lift truck	25,000.
Air compressor	<u>20,000.</u>
	\$245,000.

Wheatland:

Dump truck w/plow and spreader (27 years old)	\$ 85,000.
Dump truck w/plow and spreader (17 years old)	75,000.
Street sweeper (not needed if consolidation)	<u>100,000.</u>
	\$260,000.

Grand Total: \$1,753,800.

Paving and maintenance:

Extensive deferred paving and maintenance needs exist throughout the five municipalities. Current and projected budget resources from local tax revenues will not be able to pay for them.

Current (identified in 2002) needs are as follows:

Farrell:

10 streets, 28 blocks	\$300,000.
Replace 30 catch basins	45,000.
Replace 1 traffic signal	<u>10,000.</u>
	\$355,000.

Hermitage:

Street paving	\$325,000.
Tar and chip repair	<u>150,000.</u>
	\$475,000.

Sharon:

Replace 10 catch basins	\$ 25,000.
Repair 25 catch basins	30,000.
Repave streets	<u> ?</u>
	\$ 55,000.+

Sharpsville:

Pave ten streets	\$548,260.
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Wheatland:

Pave streets (6,000 linear feet)	<u>\$350,000.</u>
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Grand total: \$1,783,260.+

SUMMARY

The subcommittee submits that a streets department can easily be an efficient and effective operation under a consolidated city. The alignment of a consolidated streets department in a consolidated organizational structure could be under a broader area of a department or bureau of public works.

The level of staffing appears to be more than sufficient to provide the services needed. The subcommittee suggests that budgetary savings could occur with a streamlined staffing pattern, utilizing some temporary part-time and seasonal workers, the contracting out of some work that currently is performed by the departments (such as general grounds keeping, open field grass cutting, street painting, some removal of snow and ice, and some vehicle and equipment maintenance), and the scheduling of dual shifts during times of longer sunlight and good weather.

The occasional cooperative support of adjacent municipalities that occurs presently in some paving, repair, and snow removal operations leads us to be confident that a consolidation can be a smooth transition. The current streets supervisors indicated that they could continue to work together quite well in the future.

Current sharing of employees with other departments, sometimes on an unforeseen and unscheduled basis, is not conducive to an efficient operation. It is recommended that such sharing be eliminated or kept to a defined minimum.

The consolidated municipality should review its need for public parking space in commercial and public recreational areas so that sufficient space is available as may be appropriate and unneeded space is made available for other purposes.

While the current municipalities are operating adequately with the equipment on hand, significant needs exist for paving and street repairs that have been deferred due to lack of funds for new up-to-date equipment and for the maintenance of equipment that still has viable life. The consolidated city should seek funds from as many state and federal sources possible for both the completion of deferred projects and the acquisition of new equipment. At least \$3,500,000 is needed now.
