

A GUIDE TO THE

# **Metro-York Recommendations**

PRESS CONFERENCE  
NOVEMBER 15, 2007





# EVENT PROGRAM

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METRO-YORK PRESS CONFERENCE  
YORK JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER, YORK, PA  
NOV. 15, 2007, 10 A.M. E.S.T.

## Welcome

Larry Miller      Chairman, YorkCounts Board  
*President and CEO, PeoplesBank*

## Metro-York Recommendations

James DeBord      Director, YorkCounts

Bill Simpson      Co-Chair, Metro-York  
*Vice Chairman, Susquehanna Real Estate*

Eric Menzer      Co-Chair, Metro-York  
*Vice President, Wagman Construction*

###

YorkCounts is a community-based coalition working to assess, sustain and enhance York County's quality of life – building alliances, introducing partners, spotlighting issues and facilitating conversations on education, economic development, health and safety, diversity and more. Partners include Better York, the United Way of York County, Wellspan Health, York College of Pennsylvania, the York County Chamber of Commerce, the York County Commissioners and the York County Community Foundation.

YorkCounts · 605 South George Street, Suite 160 · York, PA 17401-3161 · phone 717/815-6430

*Count me in*



# NEWS RELEASE

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM EST, NOV. 15, 2007

Metro-York Co-Chairs: Eric Menzer, 767-8311; Bill Simpson, 848-3610. YorkCounts Board Chair: Larry Miller, 747-1500. Staff: James DeBord, 815-6436, cell 475-6785, jdebord@ycp.edu; Beau Boughamer, 815-6430, cell 443/974-7708, dbougham@ycp.edu.

## YorkCounts announces **Metro-York** recommendations for improving community

York, Pa., Nov. 15, 2007 – **YorkCounts**, York County's community-wide quality-of-life coalition, today presented eight forward-thinking recommendations for improving municipal prosperity and education, with the aim of a better, stronger heart of York County. Known as the Metro-York recommendations, the ideas are the outcome of YorkCounts' ambitious Metro-York project.

### **The Recommendations**

The recommendations related to municipal prosperity are to:

1. Establish a consolidated Metro-York police department;
2. Engage in additional meaningful regional planning, ideally incorporating all of the municipalities in the heart of York County;
3. Reform taxation through a local tax study commission;
4. Study ideas for modernizing York County's form of government.

The recommendations related to education are to:

1. Establish a permanent and well-funded Metro-York Schools Consortium to research, develop and implement new public school models and make all schools in York County truly world-class;
2. Attack the root problem – a school district can't succeed when poverty and its related problems are concentrated the way they are in the York City schools – with new academic programming that appeals to parents throughout York County and an education-based incentive for middle-class parents to return to the city with their children;
3. Invest \$3 million per year in each of the next ten years in "intensive care" for at-risk students: intense, targeted programming to at-risk students, as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or in middle and high school to keep them from thinking that dropping out is an option;
4. Use the soon-to-be-established Office of Workforce Development as a catalyst to strengthen relationships between employers and the Metro-York workforce.

"These recommendations are the product of a broad-based, citizen-driven community collaboration," said YorkCounts Board Chair Larry Miller. "Be the first to say, 'Count me in!'"

"Many of these approaches are working in other communities – places similar to York County," noted Metro-York co-chair Eric Menzer. "One idea, for regional police, already has traction and made the front pages in September. Let's have as much momentum for the rest of the recommendations. What's in it for you? Good jobs, good schools, safe neighborhoods – the kind of prosperity that everyone in York County wants."

## **Metro-York Background**

YorkCounts launched Metro-York in 2006 to address core concerns in the heart of the county, including a concentration of poverty, rising crime, tax burdens and inequities, a lack of job opportunities and challenges within our schools. Primary obstacles to success were identified as the “small box” divisions between school and governmental entities that make for inflexible systems, so the recommendations urge a breaking down of these divisions, although YorkCounts does not propose merging municipalities or school districts.

Metro-York co-chairs Menzer and Bill Simpson joined Miller and other participants to present the recommendations this morning during a press conference at the York Jewish Community Center, where they emphasized the importance of thinking beyond borders.

“Our communities have outgrown the borders that supposedly contain them,” Menzer said, noting that the Spring Garden Township-York Township border runs right through the York JCC’s property, but the neighborhoods on each side have common concerns. For people within the Metro-York geography – York City, North York and West York boroughs and Manchester, Spring Garden, Springettsbury, West Manchester and York townships – chances for a better quality of life are interdependent, Menzer said.

Members of the community participated in Metro-York in 2006 and 2007 through three committees. A strong, credible cross-section of elected officials, municipal administrators, business and nonprofit leaders and retired Yorkers took part. These panels listened to testimony and analysis from experts and leaders, then met numerous times to discuss and debate key concerns and formulate proposals. The results were presented to the YorkCounts Board, which adopted the recommendations.

## **Public Opinion**

Today represented the first chance for many to see the Metro-York recommendations, but the public at large has weighed in on the underlying issues before, and these concepts appear to enjoy popular support.

Miller, Menzer and Simpson noted the results of a poll of 403 York Countians conducted at the beginning of the Metro-York process by the Marttila Group. According to the survey, 89 percent of the residents of older suburbs, 91 percent of those in newer suburbs, 89 percent of urban dwellers and 89 percent of rural residents said that “smaller communities should work together to create regional police forces.” At least 89 percent of each sub-group also wanted governments to “work together on planning and development issues.”

## **Next Steps**

YorkCounts will be a driving force in advancing these ideas in the coming months and years, Simpson said. “We’ve identified champions for each and every recommendation. And we want more community input. This is a beginning, not an end, to the process of making York County a better, stronger place to live,” Simpson said.

The full text of the recommendations, background documents on each, additional information on the 2006 poll, lists of Metro-York participants, a hi-res YorkCounts logo and more can be found at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

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*Count me in*

YorkCounts – York County’s community-based quality-of-life coalition – in 2006 launched a project known as **Metro-York**.

The project has been aimed at generating specific ideas to improve municipal finances and education in the heart of York County. The idea is to do something no other lead organization is doing comprehensively: zero in on the roots of regional problems and suggest regional solutions.

First, Metro-York Workgroup participants heard from state and national experts and engaged in research and discussion of the underlying causes.

All agree that a concentration of poverty is burdening York with major financial, educational and socioeconomic problems, particularly in the inner core. Crime rates are rising – and so are the costs associated with fighting crime. Property taxes are high. Opportunities are limited, particularly for African-Americans and Latinos, whose median incomes in the city are \$22,600 and \$19,300 respectively. The city school system, despite Herculean efforts, struggles to cope with the ramifications of these trends. The result is that some are leaving the core of the county, while those left behind, especially our children, face tremendous obstacles to success.

At the same time, “small box” divisions between school and governmental entities make for inflexible systems, from education to taxation. Revenue and spending inequities prevail.

The prosperity of all of York County is threatened, and only a regional approach can make this a better and stronger community. Metro-York Workgroup participants realized that the need was for solutions that would address both the concentration of poverty and its effects and the unequal funding streams that perpetuate these conditions.

The output of the Metro-York Workgroups was delivered to the YorkCounts Board, which adopted this document.

Now YorkCounts, together with our community partners, is proud to present these recommendations.

# Metro-York Municipal Recommendations



## **1. Establish a Metro-York consolidated police department.**

Just as criminals are not constrained by municipal boundaries, our police should not be hamstrung by them, or by the uncertainty of annual budget debates. This department should be created using a model more permanent than a contract between municipalities – assuring that its viability would not be threatened by inflexible funding formulas. Township, Borough and City officials should not be satisfied simply with contributing certain percentages to a pot; rather, they should identify and establish a separate revenue source, such as a Community Safety tax, but not a property tax add-on. Work is already underway on this recommendation. The York City, Spring Garden, Springettsbury, York Area Regional and West Manchester Township police departments are already engaged in the conversation, but participation would ideally go well beyond these departments.

## **2. Engage in additional meaningful regional planning, ideally incorporating all of the municipalities in the heart of York County.**

YorkCounts concludes that integrated land use, infrastructure and transportation planning must be the foundation for determining how our region will look in the future. From sewers to zoning, some of our communities have developed excellent plans within their own borders; others have established strong inter-municipal plans; in both cases, elected leaders and administrators should be commended for their innovative efforts. Regional planning would strengthen the York area from an economic development perspective. Also, state law already empowers communities to plan regionally. Now the best of the existing plans should be coordinated, enhanced and integrated into a true comprehensive plan for the Metro-York region. In addition to land use, infrastructure and transportation elements, a truly comprehensive plan should address at least two more issues: housing affordability (no matter what their income level... people should be able to have choices for quality, affordable housing throughout the region) and tax consequences (see the next recommendation).

## **3. Reform local taxation through a local tax study commission.**

The current system of property taxes, with inherent “winners and losers,” does not serve our taxpayers or governments and is not in the best long-term economic interest of the Metro-York region. It’s also not the only way of doing things. In greater Minneapolis/St. Paul, to cite one example, a portion of the real estate tax revenue from new commercial developments is shared across the region. Revenues could be distributed to municipalities based on their percentage of nonprofit real estate and/or to school districts based on the amount of residential real estate in their tax bases. The Metro-York Municipal Workgroup liked this model, but other models could be considered. A local tax study commission should be established, to include elected officials from each municipality and school district in the Metro-York region, to study and adopt an approach that is equitable and stable – and serves the region’s long-term interests. We must also ask our state delegation for legislation to permit adoption of a new tax model.

## **4. Study ideas for modernizing York County’s form of government.**

The current structure and scope of county government may not meet the needs of a modern, changing county. The Metro-York Municipal Workgroup posed several questions: Are three people enough to represent a county with more than 416,000 residents? Is county government as effective and accountable as it could be? Why have some of Pennsylvania’s rapidly growing counties looked to change their form of county government, while others have not? While the Workgroup did not reach a consensus on exactly which form of government would be best for York County, participants agreed that it’s time for a countywide task force to study the question seriously.



# Metro-York Education Recommendations



## **1. Establish a permanent and well-funded Metro-York Schools Consortium to research, develop and implement new public school models and make all schools in York County truly world-class.**

We must break out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century education model that does not fit 21<sup>st</sup> century students. No one school district in the region is large enough to invest, on its own, in the type of research and development needed to create truly world-class schools. One or more area colleges should convene a team of the best and brightest minds – superintendents and administrators, business leaders and others – to serve as a “think tank” focused on improving student performance, bolstering mentoring capacities, encouraging parental involvement and outlining a cutting-edge curriculum – aligned with workforce needs and unrestrained by time or geography. This group will have to be funded in order to enable it to do more than just talk. It should issue reports and recommendations of its own after extensive research and eventually push for implementation of its ideas.

## **2. Attack the root problem: a school district can’t succeed when poverty and its related problems are concentrated the way they are in the York City schools.**

In York city, 85 percent of public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (which, according to government classifications, means they are living in poverty). Across the country, numerous strategies are being employed to de-concentrate school poverty in a given area, and it’s time that one or more of them be tried here. A task force must be formed to consider, prioritize and plan the implementation of:

- **New academic programming that appeals to parents throughout York County, with the added benefit that it would result in interaction between city, suburban and rural students. Enrollment would always be by choice.**
  - A “student exchange” could allow individual students from the city to go to school in the suburbs, or those from the suburbs to go to the city, for a limited period of time such as one year. Such a program would broaden academic experiences and, perhaps more importantly, break down the barriers between people.
  - A public magnet school could be open to students across York County and could be funded by those districts. It could be located centrally, but apart from any existing schools. Such a school would offer new academic opportunities to children inside and outside the city. It would also ease overcrowding in the suburban districts.
  - A public charter school could house a maximum of 49 percent city students and 51 percent non-city students – potentially, the children of parents who work in the city. This school would be located in the city.
  - A public school choice program could grant some number of York city kindergarteners admission to other districts’ elementary schools each year. Once there, they would receive special support to stay, holding the other districts harmless financially.
- **An education-based incentive for middle-class parents to return to the city with their children.** Scholarships can be powerful incentives. The Kalamazoo Promise is one example. It’s providing four-year scholarships to graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools to colleges in Michigan. The program has dual educational and economic appeal, as the city’s population decline has reversed, housing values have jumped and businesses have relocated to Kalamazoo.

(continued)



## Education Recommendations (continued)

- 3. Invest \$3 million per year in each of the next ten years in “intensive care” for at-risk students: intense, targeted programming to at-risk students, as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or in middle and high school to keep them from thinking that dropping out is an option.**

The first two recommendations are aimed at improving the educational system over the medium- and long-term. What’s important to say out loud, and understand, is that addressing the immediate needs of today’s at-risk youth is a moral imperative. A sudden infusion of money won’t fix the system, but it would help many kids now. Hundreds of teenagers are dropping out and hundreds of kindergarteners are entering school under-prepared for learning. There’s also a socioeconomic imperative; millions of dollars are being spent on a justice system that is dealing with a glut of dropouts. This is not a call to create a new program from scratch to address their needs; instead, this is an urgent call for investment in and the implementation of one or more existing programs identified as the best by education experts.

- 4. Use the soon-to-be-established Office of Workforce Development as a catalyst to strengthen relationships between employers and the Metro-York workforce.**

Just as there’s an urgent need to address the immediate needs of today’s at-risk youth (see above), it is imperative that pathways out of poverty be created for adults who find themselves alienated from employment today. YorkCounts is pleased to announce that a recommendation it made in 2004 is about to become a reality: a county Office of Workforce Development is being established (at the York County Economic Development Corporation). YorkCounts’ Metro-York recommendation is that this Office not only support employers in the context of business needs and the county’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). It must also, as a result, create new opportunities for potential employees, with an emphasis on reaching the hardest-to-serve, chronically underemployed, low-income populations — highlighting education and training programs and linking those who complete such programs with York County hiring managers. Together, employers, trainees and the Office of Workforce Development can embrace a workforce environment that recognizes the need for and value of lifelong learning, skills development and diversity.





# What is YorkCounts?

**YorkCounts is a community coalition... a public-private partnership... a change agent... an advocate... whose mission it is to improve our quality of life and build a better, stronger York County, Pennsylvania.**

YorkCounts is a community-based coalition working to assess, sustain and enhance the quality of life in York County, Pennsylvania — building alliances, introducing partners, spotlighting issues and facilitating conversations on education, health and safety, diversity and more.

Partners include Better York, the United Way of York County, Wellspan Health, York College of Pennsylvania, the York County Chamber of Commerce, the York County Commissioners and the York County Community Foundation. Additional funding comes from the Campaign to Renew Pennsylvania (RenewPA), the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and the York County Economic Development Corporation (YCEDC).

It is sometimes asked, “**Who is YorkCounts?**” The answer is — YorkCounts is *all of us*. It’s everyone who wants to leave the sidelines and have a hand in making a better, stronger York County.

# What is Metro-York?

Metro-York is a project undertaken by YorkCounts in 2006 and 2007 to generate recommendations for improving municipal prosperity and education. The aim is a better, stronger heart of York County.

Members of the community participated as part of three Metro-York committees — a Municipal Workgroup, an Education Workgroup and a Leadership committee. A strong, credible cross-section of elected officials, educators, municipal administrators, business and nonprofit leaders and retired Yorkers and others took part; what they had in common was a determination to tackle tough issues and stay focused on the core mission.

These panels heard from experts like David Rusk and Myron Orfield and held public hearings, then met numerous times to discuss and debate key concerns and formulate proposals. The Education and Municipal Workgroups presented their findings to the Leadership group, which in turn took the results to the YorkCounts Board. The Board decided on and adopted the recommendations.

YorkCounts will be a driving force in advancing these ideas in the coming months and years.

## YorkCounts/Metro-York Timeline

**1950s & 1960s** — City of York begins trend of population decline as waves of middle class residents begin moving to suburbs.

**1970s** — Commonwealth of Pennsylvania begins to reduce share of funding for local school districts as tax bases erode in places such as York.

**1980s** — Community convenes York 2000 project to deal with problems, challenges facing York. York 2000 slips into obscurity after issuing public report for which there was no attempt to galvanize public support.

**1996** — Nationally recognized consultant David Rusk comes to York, issues widely touted report detailing problems facing York County, in particular its urban core. Rusk illustrates connection between these issues and flawed development patterns.

**1999** — Community partners create YorkCounts in order to identify key indicators, measure quality of life in York County.

**2001** — YorkCounts issues first Indicators report on quality of life in York County, which confirms many of Rusk’s findings. YorkCounts partners commit to effort seeking to improve quality of life in York County.

**2002** — On return visit, Rusk places York on his list of “Most Endangered Cities,” on the edge of “no return” — but notes York’s tremendous potential if trends can be altered.

**2004** — YorkCounts issues action plan, detailing Ready Solutions to existing problems that can be addressed in collaboration with various entities throughout York County. YorkCounts establishes Compacts and Engagements to execute community improvement strategies — work that is still underway today.

**2006** — YorkCounts releases Progress and Trends report, updating public on initial steps taken in implementing Ready Solutions. Report reflects clearly that issues confronting the heart of York County must be addressed immediately. YorkCounts launches Metro-York project.

**2006 & 2007** — Metro-York Workgroups hear from experts, discuss issues, formulate proposals. Workgroups present findings to YorkCounts Board, which adopts recommendations.

**Nov. 15, 2007** — Metro-York recommendations announced.

# Public Opinion on Metro-York Issues and Ideas



The following figures come from public opinion research undertaken during the **late spring of 2006** by the Marttila Communications Group. They're based on a statistically valid survey of 403 York County residents. Reporters, producers, producers, editors: these were only some of the questions. For full results, plus methodology and more information, contact YorkCounts at 717/815-6430.

*How useful do you believe the following proposal would be? (remainders = don't know/refuse)*

**1**

To increase efficiency and provide better police protection, smaller communities should work together to create regional police forces.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Net: Useful	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>89</b>	%
Net: Not Useful	8	9	9	10	7	11	%

**2**

To better coordinate economic development including transportation plans and the protection of open space, local governments should be required to work together on planning and development issues.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Net: Useful	<b>93</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>92</b>	%
Net: Not Useful	6	3	11	7	3	7	%

*At a time of limited state resources, please tell me which statement you agree with more (remainders = don't know/refuse):*

**3**

(A) In an effort to make Pennsylvania more economically competitive, the state should **CONCENTRATE** its investment dollars on helping to redevelop the **STATE'S OLDER AREAS** rather than on the newly developing suburban and rural parts of the state. **OR**

(B) In an effort to make Pennsylvania more economically competitive, the state should continue to fund infrastructure costs and related expenses in the newer and less developed parts of the state where the growth is occurring and where people are choosing to live – **EVEN** if that means the state's older communities will receive less investment dollars.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Statement A	66	75	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>67</b>	%
Statement B	25	28	<b>26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>21</b>	%

**4**

(A) I am much more likely to support local elected officials who work toward bringing local governments together to share the delivery of police, fire and regional planning as a way to reduce costs and improve services. **OR**

(B) I am much more likely to support local officials who oppose the sharing of services with neighboring communities and who support the continued independence of these local governments.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Statement A	79	85	<b>76</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>80</b>	%
Statement B	15	12	<b>16</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	%

(continued)

## Public Opinion (continued)



- 5** (A) Local communities in Pennsylvania should be given the legal right to pool resources with neighboring communities to provide MORE EFFECTIVE shared governmental services.

As long as local communities decide to pool resources on a COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY basis, they should have every legal right to do so. The state should eliminate all legal restrictions that prevent local communities from sharing government services on a voluntary basis. **OR** (B) The pooling of resources by local communities to share government would be the first step to the loss of local control and local decision making. Further, it would be unfair to the residents of more prosperous communities who should not be burdened with paying for a share of the services in less prosperous communities. The state should maintain all legal restrictions that prevent local communities in Pennsylvania from pooling resources with neighboring communities to provide shared governmental services.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Statement A	49	61	<b>59</b>	<b>64</b>	48	48	%
Statement B	42	37	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	46	46	%

- 6** (A) Pennsylvania's system of 2500 separate and independent local governments has created a system of overlapping, confusing and competing government agencies that complicates smart economic planning and business development for the state. Too often, neighboring communities compete for the same economic developments when they should be working together to create better economic results for the entire region. Pennsylvania's economy needs more cooperation between local communities rather than competition between them. **OR** (B) Pennsylvania's system of 2500 independent local governments has created the best possible environment for business growth and development for the state. The free market and healthy competition between local communities is the best way to grow Pennsylvania's economy. Further, this system maximizes the judgment of local leaders who should be making the key decisions about the economic development for their communities.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
Statement A	60	74	<b>65</b>	<b>85</b>	66	63	%
Statement B	35	22	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	31	33	%

*I am going to read you a list of issues that people in the state tell us they are concerned about. After I read each item, please tell me if that is one of the things that worries or concerns you on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning it does not concern you at all and 10 meaning it concerns you a great deal. You can obviously name any number in between. (remainders = don't know/refuse)*

- 7** Too much haphazard and unplanned growth when it comes to building new housing and commercial developments.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
1-4	14	9	8	8	15	15	%
5-7	33	40	20	39	37	33	%
8-10	<b>52</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	%

- 8** Public schools that are not providing a quality education.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
1-4	18	12	15	19	19	12	%
5-7	28	25	27	36	20	26	%
8-10	<b>53</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>60</b>	%

- 9** An increase in violent crime.

	REPUB	DEMO	URBAN	OLDER SUB- URBAN	SUB- URBAN	RURAL	
1-4	12	13	10	11	11	17	%
5-7	32	30	29	29	30	31	%
8-10	<b>55</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>52</b>	%

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Municipal #1: Establishing a Metro-York consolidated police department.

#### Why is this a recommendation?

- Crime does not recognize borders. Law enforcement is inefficient if a crime spree on, say, a *two-mile* stretch of Route 30 between I-83 and the West Manchester Mall involves *four* different police departments that may not be able to communicate or deploy specialized resources.
- Studies have shown that consolidated departments operate more efficiently and more effectively<sup>1</sup> and can make possible future cost avoidance.
- A reputation as a safe place to live will boost the economic vitality of the heart of York County. Conversely, if “York” area has a reputation for a crime problem, it hurts the image of the entire area. And right now, the entire area is relying on the most strapped municipality to fight the core of the crime problem.

#### How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

Members of the Municipal Workgroup agreed that what’s so often described as just “city crime” is really crime that’s occurring across, and affecting all of, Metro-York. Chiefs of police have stated publicly that their departments would be more efficient and more effective working together. Many elected officials are also supportive of the idea.

The decision was made to recommend not only consolidation, but also a dedicated funding stream, because Metro-York participants have seen regional police initiatives fall apart because a single borough councilperson or township supervisor had a gripe about service levels. A combined department cannot function if it’s strung together with one-year contracts based on percentage formulas.

#### What else can you tell us about it?

This idea has the most traction of the eight so far, to the point where planning got underway before the Metro-York workgroups had even finished their meetings. The chiefs, York County’s legislative delegation and a representative of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) met in mid-September and agreed that it should be pursued. The state promotes consolidation.<sup>2</sup>

#### Where else is it being tried?

York County is already among the state’s leaders in consolidated policing. The Northern York County Regional Police Department has been in place since the early ’70s, and other departments here are thriving. There are 33 regional police forces statewide. Nationally, inter-municipal consolidation goes back at least 1954, when the Los Angeles Police Department extended services to adjoining Lakewood.

#### What happens next?

The champions of this recommendation will convene and co-chair a task force and expect the group to begin meeting immediately. The first task will be to convince each potentially involved municipality to sign a letter supporting a feasibility study, so they’ll be travelling to township and borough meetings in the coming weeks to make the case for police consolidation. Separately, the group will seek funding support from PCCD.

#### What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

A combined department will have to reconcile the different benefit and pension plans in place for each force. However: (a) this has been done before on a smaller scale, between York Township and Windsor Township during formation of the York Area Regional Police Department, and (b) York County’s state legislators say that if a local solution can be worked out, they’ll introduce specific legislation in Harrisburg to allow it. Another issue is the need to balance structural stability (achieved through a dedicated funding stream) with satisfactory local municipal representation on any governing board.

1. Krimmel, John T. “The Northern York County Police consolidation experience.” *Policing: An International Journal of Police Studies and Management*. 1997. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/Pdf/1810200304.pdf> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. *Regional Police Services in Pennsylvania: A Manual for Local Government Officials*. September 2007. <http://www.newpa.com/download.aspx?id=525> and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Municipal #2: Engaging in additional meaningful regional planning, ideally incorporating all of the municipalities in the heart of York County.

### Why is this a recommendation?

- From 1970 to 2000, the amount of urbanized land in York County grew by 155 percent while the population grew by 40 percent – a ratio of 3.9 to 1. This compares poorly to other places (the average ratio was 2.2 for the 100 largest metropolitan areas).<sup>1</sup>
- Between 1980 and 2000, the number of rural acres in York County fell from 293,000 to 68,000 – a 77-percent decline in rural land.<sup>2</sup>

Those are the numbers. Why do they matter? One reason is best expressed by the Brookings Institution: “[U]nique, historic urban centers...rural towns...[and] pastoral countryside are all under threat.” The assault on the physical place where we live is affecting our overall quality of life. Members of the Workgroup believe strongly that the distinction between urban and rural places – and the traditional small-town and rural aspects of York County that we are losing – contribute immensely to making York County a special place to live.

It’s also about economic prosperity. Brookings describes current conditions as a “spreading zone of distress” – economic competitiveness countywide inherently depends on the competitiveness of municipalities, “as manifested by their ability to deliver top-quality services [and] desirable amenities.” The more that infrastructure and public service demands are out of line with the capabilities of municipalities to meet them, the less desirable any place in York County looks to potential residents and employers.

The fiscal health of every single suburban community in metropolitan York is *already* declining,<sup>3</sup> even as taxes are going up to pay for schools, roads, sewers and other infrastructure that would not even be necessary if development patterns were not so unbalanced. Municipalities are doing everything they can to cope with these problems on their own, but it’s not enough. Collaborating will enable the Metro-York communities to *take advantage of growth and* preserve the natural beauty and livability of York County.

### How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

The Municipal Workgroup was very encouraged by the strong work that has already been done – both by municipalities on their own and as the result of inter-municipal cooperation – on everything from land use and zoning to water, sewers and other infrastructure. Now, it’s time to coordinate those efforts so that municipalities can learn from each other and growth is channeled to where existing infrastructure can support it. The Workgroup also discussed the need for an emphasis on workforce housing and housing affordability. Participants saw the lack of regional planning as a primary reason for shortcomings in these areas.

### What else can you tell us about it?

Regional land use planning used to be next to impossible – but *not anymore*. In June of 2000, Governor Ridge signed into law Act 67 and Act 68, also known as the “Growing Smarter” initiatives. These laws facilitate consistent planning at the local, metropolitan and county levels while retaining local control.

### Where else is it being tried?

To cite just one example: in Delaware County, at least 20 communities have taken advantage of the Growing Smarter legislation, preparing at least seven multi-municipal comprehensive land use plans.

### What happens next?

The champions of this recommendation will be doing more research – with YorkCounts staff support – and conducting some one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders before deciding on the best next step.

### What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

Since state law no longer presents the challenges it once did, the main obstacles relating to regional planning are inertia and support for the status quo. The champions of this idea will surely face resistance from individuals who will want more evidence that regional planning is in the best interest of their constituents.

1. Orfield, Myron. *Fiscal and Social Trends in the York Metropolitan Area*. Slide presentation delivered in 2006 and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. Committing to Prosperity: Moving Forward on the Agenda to Renew Pennsylvania. Brookings Institution. March 2007. See pages 20-24 specifically. [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2007/03pennsylvania\\_metro/committingtoprosperity.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2007/03pennsylvania_metro/committingtoprosperity.pdf) and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

3. *Structuring Healthy Communities*. Issues PA/Pennsylvania Economy League. March 2007. See page 21 specifically. [http://www.issuespa.net/shc/she\\_final.pdf](http://www.issuespa.net/shc/she_final.pdf) and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Municipal #3: Reforming local taxation through a local tax study commission.

#### **Why is this a recommendation?**

It's about economic development and prosperity for the Metro-York region. People and jobs go where economic frameworks are strong. But the city of York and *all* of the townships and boroughs surrounding it are experiencing declines in fiscal health.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it's not as if any local taxpayers are at an advantage due to the current conditions – because Pennsylvania's property tax system is deeply flawed. Growing townships don't have the revenue to meet public safety demands and manage development. Growing school districts can't keep up with their basic building and instructional needs, much less meet unfunded state and federal mandates without raising property taxes every year. And older, more established communities must bank on property taxes to keep up aging infrastructures.

New communities or old, townships or school districts – no single locality can prosper in York County if all of the other ones are struggling to meet obligations and are overtaxing their citizens – and those conditions, ultimately, are the future for the whole area unless drastic action is taken. Conversely, if municipalities and school districts work together, each of them can benefit.

If Metro-York's municipalities and school districts could really agree on a better regional plan, it would be hard for the state legislature to resist enabling it.

#### **How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?**

Although the preferred specifics of any tax plan may vary from individual to individual, participants in the Municipal Workgroup were emphatic about the need to address taxation in these recommendations. Without fundamental tax reform, neither the consolidation of services (such as police protection) nor more careful regional planning will be enough to “fix” what's ailing the heart of York County in fiscal terms.

The group decided to recommend the formation of a tax study commission because every municipality and school district whose citizens could be affected by changes should be represented in any formal discussions about reform.

#### **What else can you tell us about it?**

State law appears to be somewhat more limiting with taxes than with land use planning in terms of allowing local flexibility. However, the 1994 authorization of a Regional Asset District (RAD) in Allegheny County stands out as an example of the legislature's willingness to accommodate the interests of local communities.

#### **Where else is it being tried?**

The Twin Cities model – known in some quarters as the “Minnesota Miracle” – might be the most written-about example of regional revenue sharing.<sup>2</sup> A portion of the real estate tax revenue from commercial/industrial developments built since 1971 is shared across the region. This way, for example, it's not just one small town that benefits from the presence of the Mall of America – it's the whole area.

#### **What happens next?**

The champions of this recommendation will seek participation from each Metro-York municipality and school district in a local tax study commission.

#### **What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?**

The obstacles associated with actually changing taxation are self-evident. But the obstacles related to forming a study commission – having the *discussion* about taxation – are fewer. It will be important to bring each municipality and school district to the table. Limited participation would defeat the purpose.

1. *Structuring Healthy Communities*. Issues PA/Pennsylvania Economy League. March 2007. See page 21 specifically. [http://www.issuespa.net/shc/shc\\_final.pdf](http://www.issuespa.net/shc/shc_final.pdf) and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. *Minnesota's Fiscal Disparities Programs*. Minnesota House of Representatives. 1995. <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/fiscaldis.pdf> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Municipal #4: Studying ideas for modernizing York County's form of government.

#### **Why is this a recommendation?**

It has been three decades since changes to York County's form of government were last contemplated. At that time, the discussion was about a conversion to Home Rule, in which the county itself gains control over how it will be governed, potentially giving its citizens more of a say. Since then, the county has grown rapidly, with population spreading out from the city, up from Baltimore and down from Harrisburg. Rural land has been developed for housing. The economy has shifted – with the service sector growing and with many “bedroom communities” becoming dependent on long commutes. The costs of providing government services, from health care to incarceration, have risen dramatically. And York County has become proportionally more powerful in Pennsylvania, adding residents as other parts of the state are losing population. In short, a lot has changed in three decades, but York Countians have not looked at whether the current form of county government is as good a fit as it was for the York County of the past.

#### **How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?**

People in the Municipal Workgroup had wide-ranging opinions about the form of county government. Some thought, for example, that it's hard for a three-person board of commissioners to represent vastly different points of view coming from York city, York's suburbs, the southern end of the county, the northern end of the county, Hanover and other points. Others wondered whether taxes might go down, or might go up, if there are changes – or whether services would be positively or negatively affected. Some said that county government, in itself, is “regional,” and perhaps some public services could be moved to the county level, at a cost savings. In the end, Metro-York participants decided not only that more information is needed, but that it would be irresponsible *not* to study the issue further in light of the way York County has changed in recent decades.

#### **What else can you tell us about it?**

State law dictates that “the decision of whether or not to study a municipal government and consider the advisability of change is made by the voters. At the same time this decision is made, the voters elect a group of citizens to conduct the study and report their recommendations back to the electorate for final decision.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the first step must be to put the question on the ballot: Do the citizens of York County want to study the possibility of change? Also, it's important to note that Home Rule is *not the only alternative form of government that can be considered*. Pennsylvania law allows for both Home Rule government and something known as Optional Plan government, in which home rule powers are not transferred to the county, but the administrative structure could change (for example, shifting to a larger “county council”).

#### **Where else is it being tried?**

Pennsylvania's Home Rule counties include three fast-growing counties (Delaware, Lehigh and Northampton) and three other large counties (Allegheny, Erie and Lackawanna). Right now, Lancaster County is in the middle of studying Home Rule. Lancaster County voters approved the formation of a commission. That commission, in turn recommended two months ago that a Home Rule charter be drafted.

#### **What happens next?**

The champions of this recommendation will look into the formation of a Government Study Commission, which would have to be approved by voters. It could be added to the ballot in one of two ways: the York County commissioners could place it on the ballot by ordinance; or the citizens of York County could petition (about 6300 signatures would be needed).

#### **What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?**

The main issue involves winning the agreement of the citizens of York County that a study should be undertaken. It's important to note that voters would be asked not whether government should be changed, but rather whether the idea should be reviewed. Down the road, voters would have the chance to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to the concrete idea of a Home Rule charter or Optional Plan of government.

1. *Home Rule in Pennsylvania*, Seventh Edition. Governor's Center for Local Government Services/Department of Community and Economic Development. March 2003. <http://www.celdf.org/portals/0/pdf/Home%20Rule%20in%20PA.pdf> and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Education #1: Establishing a permanent and well-funded Metro-York Schools Consortium to research, develop and implement new public school models and make all schools in York County truly world-class.

### Why is this a recommendation?

A recent Pittsburgh Business Times analysis of standardized test scores not only had the York City school district fourth from the bottom among all 501 Pennsylvania school districts, but also included not a single York County school district in the state's top 40.<sup>1</sup> Some of our schools are struggling, others are doing relatively well, but all face myriad challenges, including new performance demands and budget cuts, and none are the best in the state. We don't just want good schools – we want great schools, the best schools. All of our children, from South George Street to North Hopewell Township, deserve nothing less. So it's time for the county's school administrators, elected school board members, academic experts, parents and others to begin talking about how to make that a reality.

### How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

Participants in the Metro-York Education Workgroup believed strongly in the value and importance of local control for schools. However, they recognized that combined resources can often be a force multiplier.

- One small local school district might not be able to offer many Advanced Placement courses. Several, pooling students and resources, could offer a full menu.
- A single district might not be able to afford a full-time teacher for a specialized but important subject, such as a computer programming technique or a foreign language. Several working together could hire such a teacher.
- Smaller school districts might have just one educator teaching a given subject at a given grade level, leaving him or her without any opportunity to collaborate with or learn from colleagues. A consortium of districts might present new opportunities for professional development.

The first step is to begin a conversation – to take a close look, together, at what's happening in the classrooms – learning from each other's best practices and detecting good and bad trends quickly.

### What else can you tell us about it?

This idea received a major boost during the Metro-York conversation when Dr. George Waldner, the president of York College of Pennsylvania, said that York College could host such a consortium. This would present the group with ready access to experts in the field as well as a physical place to meet, centrally located and neutral to the many school districts that would be involved.

### Where else is it being tried?

A lot of *logistical* coalitions exist, but we're still working to determine whether what YorkCounts proposes here has been tried anywhere else.

### What happens next?

The champions of this recommendation will be approaching each of the county's 16 school districts and the School of Technology to identify one or more participants from each – and to start to develop an agenda. The intent is for this group to meet for the first time within several months.

### What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

The biggest obstacle to ideas like this used to be the fear that having a joint conversation would lead down a path to school consolidation. However, this is no longer the case. First, a study commissioned for the Pennsylvania legislature revealed that full district mergers in York County would not produce cost savings,<sup>2</sup> so the demand for mergers is fading. Second, though, school districts have begun to find out that cooperating – in ways that are far short of consolidation – can save money and, most importantly, improve each district. Most of this joint work so far has been in areas like purchasing and insurance. What Metro-York proposes is a consortium that would talk not about those logistical concerns, but instead about cutting-edge classroom techniques to improve the student experience. So the only real obstacles are any individual district's unwillingness to participate... and the general need to secure enough funding to start up the consortium and keep it going.

1. Hicks, Larry. "Schools are not passing the test." *York Dispatch*, June 20, 2007. [http://www.yorkdispatch.com/viewpoints/hicks/ci\\_6185473](http://www.yorkdispatch.com/viewpoints/hicks/ci_6185473) and available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. Kauffman, Christina. "Study says York County schools too big to consolidate." *York Dispatch*, June 19, 2007. Available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Education #2: Attacking the root problem: a school district can't succeed when poverty and its related problems are concentrated the way they are in the York City schools.

### Why is this a recommendation?

The biggest single determinant of the condition of the York City School District is the concentration of poverty that grips the student population. There's no talking around this fact.

### How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

The Metro-York Education Workgroup was the scene of passionate debates about the concentration of poverty in city schools. Some members were prepared to recommend disbanding the city school district and dividing its students among neighboring districts – but the majority focused on improvement and new opportunities within the current system. Rather than recommending a single strategy, participants decided to present a menu of potential solutions. Our region stands at the beginning, not the end, of the dialogue on this issue. We hope the community's leaders – from educators themselves to business leaders and from clergy to editors – will use this as a chance to *ask* the community: Which of these ideas will work best for York?

### What else can you tell us about it?

Other than grouping them by purpose, the ideas in this recommendation are listed in no particular order. Each had some support in the Workgroup. Participants did agree on the need for both “inside-out” and “outside-in” solutions: strategies that will increase interaction and educational opportunities between existing city and sub-urban populations *and* a plan for drawing middle-class parents back to the city with their children.

### Where else is it being tried?

The communities that are undertaking one or more of these strategies are too numerous to fully document here. The Kalamazoo Promise, for example, has been in place just since 2005 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, but efforts to establish similar programs are underway from El Dorado, Ark. to Newton, Iowa.<sup>1, 2</sup>

### What happens next?

Because the scope of the conversation is so wide, their first objective for the champions of this recommendation will be to identify others who want to work specifically on these issues.

### What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

To be clear, this will be the most difficult conversation – the one with the most different points of view and the most ardent opponents of doing anything at all – but that's okay. Some of the municipal recommendations will see more progress, sooner, because the issues on that side have been talked about for years. The community has been ready for a while to address many of them. In the case of this education recommendation, again, this is the *beginning* of the dialogue. Several of the Metro-York ideas have never been introduced in a public forum in York County before. So – let's be ready for disagreements and bumps in the road, but let's start by agreeing that *change of some kind is necessary*. Otherwise, five or ten years from now, the situation will be much, much worse, and Harrisburg or Washington are likely to place on the table much more radical suggestions than Metro-York's.

1. Kalamazoo Promise. <http://kalamazoopromise.com> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. *Communities with Programs Modeled on the Kalamazoo Promise*. W.E. Upjohn Institute. <http://www.upjohninst.org/promise/communities.html> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Education #3: Invest \$3 million per year in each of the next ten years on “intensive care” for at-risk students: intense, targeted programming to at-risk students, as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or in middle and high school to keep them from thinking that dropping out is an option.

### **Why is this a recommendation?**

The purpose of Metro-York has largely been to look at medium- and long-term solutions to the region’s most pressing needs, but in this area, a short-term fix is also needed. Current students and recent graduates are struggling *today*. These students can’t be left behind just because it will take a while to establish new big-picture programs.

### **How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?**

Metro-York Education Workgroup participants, and the experts they heard from, offered many examples of programs that they know of that work. These are programs that already exist but are currently limited in terms of funding, so they’re serving dozens of students instead of hundreds. A prime example is Quantum Opportunities, which is a four-year dropout prevention initiative<sup>1</sup> for high-schoolers run by York’s YWCA. Members of the Workgroup were excited to learn that immediate needs could be met through existing programs... and Metro-York wants to let the community know that supporting these efforts is a way people can help *now*.

### **What else can you tell us about it?**

The figure of \$3 million is based on a pair of analyses. The York County YMCA obtains a third-party programming cost analysis every three years, and currently, the YMCA’s estimate is that it takes \$4732 to serve one student in a given youth development program for one year – so serving a base of 500 students would cost close to \$2.4 million. The YWCA, on the other hand, provided hard figures on Quantum Opportunities. It costs \$300,000 to serve 50 students for one year, so it would cost about \$3 million to serve 500 students for one year. These total figures, \$2.4 million and \$3 million, are close enough to each other that they represent an adequate estimate; Metro-York is using the larger of the two figures with hopes that as many students as possible will be helped.

### **Where else is it being tried?**

Quantum Opportunities, for example, has been in place in numerous metropolitan areas, including Baltimore; Birmingham, Ala.; Columbia, S.C.; Dover, N.H.; Herndon, Va.; Jackson, Miss.; Portland, Ore.; and Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup> The program was developed by Philadelphia-based OIC of America, Inc.

### **What happens next?**

The initial goals for the champions of this recommendation will be to raise awareness of effective existing programs and to identify potential funding streams.

### **What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?**

A major obstacle to success is avoided because Metro-York is endorsing the support of existing programs that have an *established record of success*. It will, of course, be a challenge to find \$3 million in support per year. One hope is that, by highlighting what has been working, we can make it easier for philanthropists and businesses to decide how to allocate their gifts over the next several years. Separately, local civic and political leaders should join forces to lead the charge for more state funding for these programs now.

1. YWCA of York. <http://www.ywcaofyork.org/qop.html> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. Eisenhower Foundation. <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/qop.php> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Education #4: Use the soon-to-be-established Office of Workforce Development as a catalyst to strengthen relationships between employers and the Metro-York workforce.

### Why is this a recommendation?

Metro-York participants saw a need to include a recommendation that would complement Education #3 – immediately attacking concentration of poverty and lack of opportunity in the workforce, not just the classroom.

When both those speaking for employers and those speaking for the workforce during the Metro-York experience noted a “disconnect” between the two groups, it was not a surprise. Workforce development has been a topic of discussion at YorkCounts for years. In 2004, YorkCounts put forth 30 “ready solutions,” or community improvement ideas upon which other entities could choose to build. Since then, the York County Economic Development Corporation (YCEDC) has, in fact, built off the recommendation that an Office of Workforce Development be established. The YCEDC is in the process of hiring a director for such an Office, so now was the natural time to highlight this critical improvement.

### How did Metro-York reach the decision to include it?

Three years ago, the dialogue wasn’t about the details. Now, at a turning point for the region on this issue, there’s an urgency to make sure that the new Office be attuned – from the beginning – to the real needs of the community.

Except for Education #3 and Education #4, the Metro-York ideas are crafted for the medium and long term. But participants in this process insisted that neither our current elementary, middle and high school students... *nor* those who are in their 20s and 30s and are struggling to find work... could be left behind.

### What else can you tell us about it?

The Office of Workforce Development was a component of the York County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) produced by the YCEDC and YorkCounts.<sup>1</sup>

### Where else is it being tried?

Business leaders and workforce advocates have been making it a priority to create and expand workforce development initiatives in Pennsylvania. The commonwealth has an office that offers background on the field,<sup>2</sup> and economic development corporations have taken proactive steps in this area from Clarion County to Schuylkill County.<sup>3, 4</sup>

### What happens next?

The YCEDC will coordinate with the champions of this recommendation. The current plan is to seek the formation of a community advisory committee to the new Office, once it’s established.

### What are, realistically, some obstacles this idea faces?

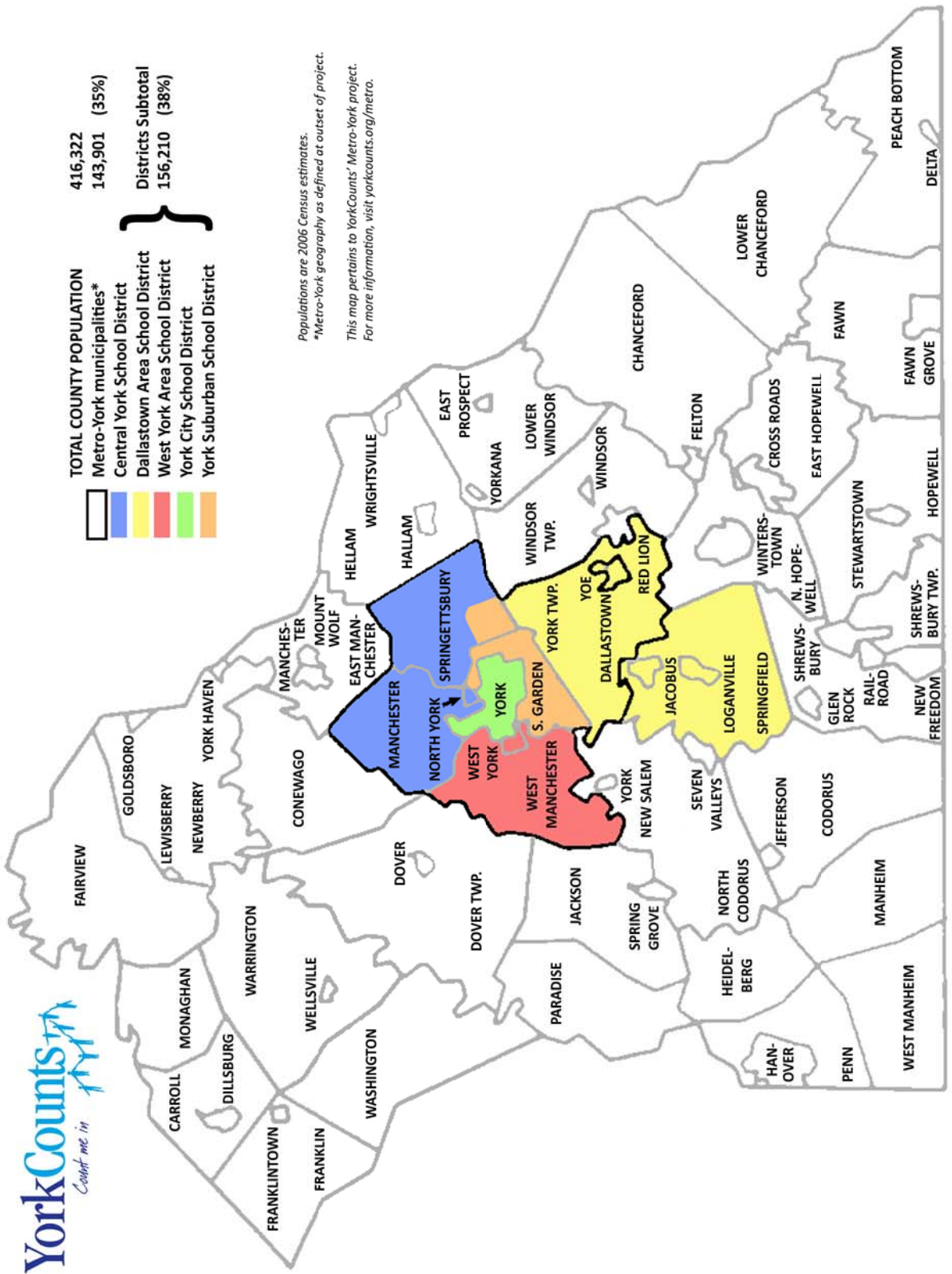
Three years ago, the main obstacle was the lack of an Office of Workforce Development. That will no longer be a problem! Still, this is a field of activity where all parties will have to work hard to institutionalize the mutual values of trust and cooperation.

1. York County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report available at [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

2. Pennsylvania Workforce Development. <http://www.paworkforce.state.pa.us/about/site/default.asp> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

3. Clarion County Economic Development Corporation. <http://www.callclarionpa.com/> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

4. Schuylkill Workforce Partnership. <http://www.schuylkillworkforce.com/> and available via [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).



Populations are 2006 Census estimates.  
 \*Metro-York geography as defined at outset of project.  
 This map pertains to YorkCounts' Metro-York project.  
 For more information, visit [yorkcounts.org/metro](http://yorkcounts.org/metro).

# 'Please, let us all come to the table'



## Op-ed

by **James DeBord**  
**YorkCounts Director**

This month is a busy one for YorkCounts. On Thursday, November 15, at 10:00 a.m., YorkCounts will be rolling out the recommendations formulated as part of the Metro-York project at public event to be held at the York Jewish Community Center. The Metro-York project is an effort that is nearly two years in the making. Countless volunteers have spent hours upon hours, attending meetings, education sessions, community forums and hearings in attempt to come up with a solid set of recommendations that will address the core, root problems that are blocking municipal and educational prosperity within the municipalities at the heart of York County.

When the recommendations are presented to the public, it will not represent the end of a process. Instead, it will be the beginning of new process, which is to offer up these ideas for everyone in the York County community to come forward to discuss, debate and ponder, and ultimately, assist in their implementation in some shape or form.

YorkCounts is well aware that the recommendations that will be released this coming week might not be exactly what every person out there thinks are the best ideas for how to strengthen the economy, improve our educational system, and create greater opportunities for the people who are served by the municipalities and school districts in the Metro-York region. But they are a set of ideas that a broad group of citizen volunteers put a great deal of thought into, and that they believe will make conditions in the city, townships and boroughs, as well as the school districts much better than they are at today.

Some YorkCounts volunteers have been asked on occasion by a few members of the greater York community why they should care about these issues. The simple reply that I've heard time and time again is that they believe that people are only kidding themselves if they don't think these current municipal and educational challenges aren't eventually coming to their particular geographic area of the community where they work or live. We can all work now to address these problems and eliminate the root causes or

we can continue to pay more and more in tax dollars to treat the symptoms of these root problems if we do not seek to find a cure. We can either work to create a system where there are more productive, active citizen participants contributing to the greater good of this community or we can look the other way and try to hide until these problems arrive on our doorsteps.

This is not just the opinion of your fellow citizens who have volunteered for the Metro-York effort, this is also the well researched opinion of highly respected organizations such as the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL). The researchers at PEL, who are funded by business and foundation interests from

across Pennsylvania have stated that because of how local governments and school districts in Pennsylvania are structured, and because of how they are forced to function within those confines, they are all heading toward the same set of fiscal and educational challenges that we see impacting our cities, boroughs and older townships not only across York County, but all across Pennsylvania.

So, in the spirit of the Thanksgiving season, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the countless volunteers and citizens from across York County who have supported YorkCounts and the Metro-York project over the past year. On behalf of the YorkCounts Board, I would like to extend an invitation to everyone in York County to come to the table of public discourse in the weeks and months ahead and give the Metro-York recommendations the thorough going over and inspection I believe they will need. In the end, I hope that we can all find ways to come together in order to make York County an economically and educationally stronger and more vibrant community for the benefit of all. For that, I will be truly thankful.

*This piece was published in the November 11, 2007 edition of the York Sunday News.*

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**When the recommendations are presented, it will not represent the end of a process. Instead, it will be the beginning of a new process.**

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# Metro-York Participants



## Metro-York

### Municipal Workgroup

Darrell Auterson  
Tom Bogart  
Phil Briddell  
Leo Cooper  
Elizabeth Dellinger  
John D'Ottavio  
Tom Gross  
Rosa Hickey  
Steve Hovis  
Jack Kay  
John Krout (co-chair)  
Jeff Lobach  
Michael O'Rourke  
Bill Schenck  
Bill Swartz III  
Joe Wagman (co-chair)  
Shanna Wiest

### Education Workgroup

Fred Botterbusch II  
Tony Campisi (co-chair)  
Glenn Caufman  
Joe Crosswhite  
Jane Davis  
Linda Estep  
Ellen Freireich  
Bill Kerlin (co-chair)  
Jeff Kirkland  
Jim Kraft  
Melanie Lehman  
Emilie Lonardi  
Michael Newsome  
Joel Rodney  
Mike Smeltzer  
Dale Voorheis

### Leadership Committee

Reed Anderson  
Tony Campisi  
Charles Chodroff, M.D.  
Tom Donley  
Dan Elby  
Sue Krebs  
John Krout  
Dave Meckley  
Eric Menzer (co-chair)  
Rev. David Lovelace  
Cindy Pol  
Larry Richardson  
Bill Simpson (co-chair)  
Bobby Simpson  
Ernie Waters  
Bob Woods

## YorkCounts Board

Reed Anderson  
Darrell Auterson  
Susan Barry  
Tom Donley  
Don Gogniat  
Austin Hunt  
Dave Meckley  
Eric Menzer  
Larry Miller (chair)  
Lori Mitrick  
Maria Royce  
Bill Simpson  
Joe Wagman  
George Waldner  
Ernie Waters  
Bob Woods

## YorkCounts Partners



United Way of York County



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