



### What's in store for police regionalization?

**Summary:** Cheswick Borough and Springdale Township in Allegheny County have opted to dissolve their individual police departments in favor of consolidating their resources into a regional police force—the Allegheny Valley Regional Police Department (department). In April 2019, municipal leaders approved the proposed collaboration with July 1 as the start date.

A study of the department was conducted by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services (LGS) and delivered to the municipalities in October 2018. It noted Article IX, Section 5 of the Pennsylvania Constitution provides the basis for police cooperation and consolidation. Regional policing is an option for municipalities that have difficulties providing a full range of service to meet increasing demand. Other alternatives include contracting to another municipality or relying on state police.

Based on data from the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), most municipalities in Allegheny County have their own police force. Three are covered by state police and 16 contract out to another municipality and one to the county. Cheswick and Springdale Township's formation of the department is the second regional police force consolidation in Allegheny County since Northern Regional was established in the late 1960s by three municipalities (a fourth joined in 2006). Statewide, 122 municipalities are part of a regional police force.

**Municipal Police Service, 2019**

Type	Allegheny		Rest of PA		Total
	#	%	#	%	#
Municipal	102	80	850	35	952
Regional	6	5	116	5	122
Contracted	17	13	192	8	209
State	3	2	1,274	52	1,277
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,432</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,560</b>

The study outlined data on the municipal departments involved in the then-prospective consolidation, which it affirmatively recommended.

The study noted advantages of regional policing including improvement in uniformity and consistency of enforcement; coordination of law-enforcement services; recruitment, distribution and deployment of police personnel; training and personnel efficiency; management and supervision; career enhancement opportunities and in reducing costs. Disadvantages of consolidating services include loss of local services; loss of local control; loss of citizen contact and loss of personnel rank. In a 2014 report by the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) on police consolidation, loss of municipal control was the main obstacle identified in forming regional police departments with labor issues close behind.

The study indicated that Cheswick's and Springdale Township's populations (1,746 and 1,615, respectively) were similar. Collectively, the municipalities cover a 2.95 square-mile area with a population density of 1,139.3 occupants per square mile. Full-time police totaled three with a police chief in Cheswick, two officers in Springdale Township and between seven and 13 part-timers providing coverage as well in both municipalities. No civilians performed clerical functions. Police costs stood at \$324,945 in Cheswick and \$373,364 in Springdale Township, totaling \$698,309. Not included in the study was that both police pensions were well-funded and that the neighboring communities were moving toward cooperative fire protection.

Regarding crime, the study documented Part I Offenses (serious crimes such as homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, auto theft and arson) and Part II Offenses (less severe crimes that do not include wrongdoings, such as moving traffic or parking violations). In 2016, the two municipalities' crime rate per 100,000 residents averaged to 684.32 and 2,969.81 for Part I and Part II offenses, respectively, which were lower than state averages.

Based on a police force with a chief, two full-time officers, and four part-time officers, a proposed full-year operating budget was estimated at \$499,998. In a letter sent to residents of Cheswick in March 2019, it was stated that the municipalities would fund the department on a 50-50 basis. The letter estimated the borough would be required to pay \$233,258, which would be approximately \$90,000 less than 2018 budgeted police expenditures. A news article noted the savings in Springdale Township would be \$130,000 per year—representing 28 percent and 37 percent of municipal police budgets, respectively.

The official budget for 2019, adopted in June 2019 with staffing of a chief, a patrol officer and six part-time officers, was \$449,839, or \$224,919 per municipality. In order to cover the remainder of 2019 (July to December), total expenses of \$238,583—\$119,291 per municipality—were approved. This includes payroll of \$134,709 (56 percent), taxes and insurance totaling \$57,914 (24 percent) and vehicle costs of \$17,250 (7 percent).

The Allegheny Institute has advocated for service consolidation (along with mergers and privatization) to be explored and encouraged in order to save taxpayer dollars. Not all

consolidations go forward—a proposed regional force involving Sharpsburg, Aspinwall, O’Hara and Blawnox was not recommended because it would have meant higher costs. Another in the Mon Valley is currently being studied.

The LBFC report found that a sample of regional police departments cost approximately 25 percent less than stand-alone departments but some had increased costs in initial years after formation. As such, residents of Cheswick and Springdale Township ought to keep a vigilant eye to see if the savings occur and ultimately translate into lower taxes.

Although intergovernmental cooperation can be complicated, the study indicated that, in this case, the benefits outweighed the challenges. As the department continues in operation, the Institute will monitor the consolidation to see if it works as planned and the savings materialize as projected.

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