



# Alexandria Township

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**TO:** Honorable Louis Greenwald  
Chair  
Assembly Budget Committee

**FROM:** Carol S. Hoffmann  
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**SUBJECT:** Local Government Issues

We are all in agreement that changes need to be made in order to balance the State's budget. The latest efforts call for a cut, or elimination, of Consolidated Municipal Property Tax Relief Aid to small municipalities. The assumption is that this will cut costs in an attempt to balance the budget.

Small municipalities run on shoe strings. There is no fat in our budgets. Our salaries are minimal with some municipalities not compensating their elected officials at all. Many of us do not have health benefits and our retirement is not going to make a dent in the state pension program.

As far as combining to save money, many small towns have been sharing services for some time in order to save money.

Alexandria is a township of 28.2 square miles in rural Hunterdon County with a population of a little over 5,000. With a \$3.5 million budget, our Township has a long history of sharing:

Alexandria Township:

- contracts with six volunteer fire companies,
- five volunteer rescue squads,
- has no police and uses the rural State Police
- has no municipal building, many of us working out of our homes
- shares road crews and equipment with two neighboring towns
- shares a library with one town
- shares a court with three other towns and looking into fourth
- has no fleet of cars for our employees
- has a contract with a buying co-op for road supplies to maintain our 50 miles of roads
- has one full-time Township Clerk
- has one part-time Building Clerk
- has a part-time Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, Zoning Officer, Building, Electrical, Plumbing and Fire Inspectors that work in other towns, and
- relies heavily on volunteers to support its schools, park, community programs and web site

For municipalities to merge would take much time and money. There is a cornucopia of different issues that one merged municipality would now have to face.

At this time we are dealing with:

- how our township will interact with the Highlands Master Plan
- new Council on Affordable Housing regulations that have not been synchronized with the Highlands Plan
- re-accessing our Wastewater Management Plan to include septic monitoring plans
- enacting new Farmland Preservation criteria
- Flood Management regulations which affect every stream in our Township
- a Superfund and brownfields redevelopment area, and
- new recycling requirements

With all these mandates and regulations come increased planner and attorney fees to implement them. To study merging would also incur large fees. In the immediate future, the residents of New Jersey need some relief from the tax burden that they are shouldering. It should not be at the expense of the less densely populated and agriculturally rich communities in New Jersey.

This is not to say that some municipalities would not benefit by seeking to merge. It is just that our tax money should not be withheld because of size. Efficiency should be a determining factor in how our tax dollars are spent. It is a quality of life issue when people seek out small towns to put down roots and raise their children.

Singling out small municipalities also targets farming communities. We already get by with less tax dollars due to farmland assessment and pay a farmland preservation tax. The more farming a town supports, generally it has a lesser density.

Although it is commendable that combining departments is being looked at; I would strongly recommend against eliminating the Department of Agriculture. This department, with 245 filled positions, receives its greatest amount of funding from the federal government and is the life line to an already stressed industry.

We are recognizing the importance of green initiatives to preserve a quality of life for future generations. Farming is a large part of this. As it becomes more and more difficult to farm, the land will be sold for development. The State will become more dependent on other areas for food. We need to encourage the sustainability of agriculture in our State and retain our position as The Garden State.

Putting more pressure on agriculture will not only affect the rural areas, but will have a trickle down effect. The further our food products have to travel, the more costly they will become with the ever-rising cost of fuel.

The Department of Agriculture works year round with, and for, farmers to support the overall economic viability and profitability of the Garden State's agricultural industry.

Highlands legislation has already had an impact on the farming community. They, as well as their municipalities, are being asked to protect the water supplies for the cities. Eliminating a department that directly supports them is another impediment to the struggling farmers.

I respectfully submit these comments for your review and consideration.

Carol Hoffmann  
Deputy Mayor  
Alexandria Township