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Bergen County Leads the Way in Shared Services

Sharing services and consolidation are feasible solutions that must be considered if municipalities are to maintain fiscally sound budgets.

In the midst of a major presidential election and global economic crisis, towns in Bergen County continue to discuss shared services as a way to reduce local taxpayers' financial burdens.

As County Executive of the largest county in New Jersey, with a population of over 900,000, my administration has tried to squeeze more savings from our tax dollars by leading the way in sharing services.

While many of us have become comfortable with the concept of "home rule," the reality is that this individuality costs a great deal more than if we were able to share some of the operating costs of municipal services with other government entities.

These tough economic times are likely to translate into cuts in municipal aid that will be felt the hardest in our state's 323 smallest towns. Under Governor Corzine's spending plan, municipalities with fewer than 10,000 people will see the most dramatic cuts from Trenton.

That is why Bergen County helped spearhead a new, shared Department of Public Works garage for the towns of Cliffside Park and Fairview. We purchased two state-of-the-art street sweepers to be shared among towns that have

joined the Northwest Mayors Association to help them meet the state's new stormwater regulations. We also began a countywide consolidation of 9-1-1 Communications and Public Safety Dispatch to eliminate redundant and costly municipal services that also puts more police officers on the street instead of answering phones.

These are concrete examples of consolidating and sharing services that in time will lead to significant property tax savings.

During this period of financial struggle, it's critical that elected officials think outside the box and make the tough calls that will serve their residents' best interest. I applaud the Boroughs of Demarest, Haworth and Maywood for their proactive approach and willingness to explore the value of shared services and consolidation.

Sharing services and consolidation are feasible solutions that must be considered if municipalities are to maintain fiscally sound budgets.

The referendums on this November ballot were a sign of changing times. Residents need strong leaders that can step up against opposition and take the necessary steps to promote positive change. ▲