



Borough of Wenonah

Office of the Mayor

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Members of Council and
Residents of the Borough of Wenonah

**RE: Mantua Township Proposal for Police Services for the
Borough of Wenonah**

Council and Residents of Wenonah,

As Mayor, I must pursue and explore all cost savings. Police services are no exception. Our average property taxes in Wenonah are among the highest in South Jersey. Over the years of my public service to this Borough, I have learned that we, the tax-payers of New Jersey, are our own worse enemy. We all complain about our high property taxes, with each governmental entity pointing their finger at the other ("its not us, it's the school, the County, the Borough"). Yet none of the us do anything to seriously address the problem so the cycle continues, with taxes growing exponentially all the while. This must stop. We must make the hard decisions to reduce our tax burden.

This past winter, I reached out to Mantua Township and requested a proposal for police services. Following receipt of an initial proposal, I, along with Council President Kaeferle and our Borough Solicitor, met with representatives from Mantua Township on several occasions. What follows is the result of those negotiations:

Proposed Cost - In recent years, our police related expenditures have averaged approximately \$1,000,000.00 annually, comprising a significant portion of our municipal budget. My conservative estimate for police-related expenditures for 2018 are approximately \$900,000.00 to \$950,000.00. Mantua has offered to provide police services for the Borough for an annual sum of \$550,000.00. We will then enter into a contract for services that will include predictable annual increases as negotiated by Council. After full implementation, our expenditures will be reduced by \$350,000.00 to \$400,000.00 each year and every year thereafter. The Borough is projected to save approximately \$3,000,000.00

over the next ten (10) years. These are not inconsequential savings to our Borough or our tax-payers.

Proposed Police Service – Mantua Township Police Department (“MTPD”) is an accredited department. The service they will provide is equal, if not greater, than the service that we are able to currently provide. Wenonah would be incorporated into a zone that will have two (2) patrol cars at all time, plus a roving supervisor. The MTPD will provide response times equal to our levels while bringing greater resources to bare. In short, MTPD will be able to offer services that Wenonah is unable nor will ever be able to provide due to cost. For example, MTPD has a detective bureau, two (2) canine officers, motor vehicle crash investigation unit, and extensive community policing practices. Additionally, MTPD has police administrators and a full complement of command personnel. Simply, MTPD can provide our residents with greater police resources for less costs. More for less.

Our Police Officers – The Wenonah Police Department is currently comprised of five (5) Patrolmen and one (1) Chief. Each Patrolman will receive full consideration by our partners in Mantua as well as the Gloucester County Sheriff’s Office for currently available positions. For me, this is a critical component of this proposal and was among the first issues I raised. I will work with our officers and their union representatives to assist their transitions into these and other positions. Presently, our officers have no career advancement opportunities in Wenonah. It is a dead-end job. We are so small that we cannot offer the training and growth opportunities available elsewhere. They are also the lowest paid officers in the county, and among the lowest paid in South Jersey. I have to believe that our officers will transition into positions that will offer greater career opportunities and compensation than we could ever hope to provide.

Our Police Property – all Borough equipment, including vehicles, will either be sold for fair market value, or bought by Mantua. Any revenue from the sale of Borough property will be dollar for dollar less taxes that we will need to collect from our residents.

State Aid – Presently, legislation is pending in Trenton that will require the state’s Local Unit Alignment Reorganization and Consolidation Commission (“LUARC”) to recommend what local services

municipalities must share or outsource. Failure to follow the LUARC's recommendation will result in the loss of state aid. Wenonah currently receives approximately \$160,000.00 in state aid. I can assure you, Wenonah will be among the first municipalities subjugated to this review. It is imperative that the Borough take the initiative and secure all available services now before jeopardizing the loss of this aid. Once LUARC makes a recommendation, it is unknown whether the Borough will have the option of choosing its partner or even negotiating the terms of service. We must act now to control our own destiny and enter into a policing relationship on our own terms.

Why Mantua? – Wenonah currently partners with Mantua in several other areas. We share a joint Municipal Court, Code Enforcers, and a Construction Office. We share a border to our west and south. Aside from the difference in size, demographics of our two municipalities are similar. Many MTPD officers are familiar with our Borough, having either grown up here or they have spent time here in their youth. Moreover, Mantua's police station is a mere 1.6 miles from the center of Wenonah. Finally, through our daily interaction, there is a high level of confidence and trust between our two communities.

Loss of home rule and/or control – Council has little control of the day to day operations of our Borough's police department. Our police operate autonomously under the direction of the Chief. While Council can certainly set broad policy, under the law, the Chief determines how that policy is carried out. Moreover, our current relationship with our police is governed in large part by employment and labor contracts. Our relationship with MTPD will also be governed by a contract. In essence, our day to day interaction with police personnel will not change. What will change is the name on the side of the vehicles, name on the badge, and some of the officers that you will see. That is it.

What about a referendum? – I do not support a referendum. Council was elected to make this decision. It is their responsibility to govern. A referendum is non-binding and will only be divisive. We must not pit our police against Council and residents in a contentious drawn out publicity campaign. Plus, delaying this action will cost this Borough approximately \$45,000.00 a month in expenditures for police services we would

otherwise not have to make if we act now. More importantly, any delay will likely cause the current proposal to be retracted. If retracted, we'll lose control over the process and may be left with inferior partners and less favorable financial terms moving forward.

Reducing our expenditures and saving tax dollars is how we position our Borough to move forward and remain the vibrant community that it is today. Our policing services have evolved over the years and this is the next step in the story of our town. I can no longer justify paying a premium for police services when other less costly options are so readily available. This is a hard decision, an uncomfortable decision, but a decision necessary to make. I urge all of Council to support disbanding our police department and vote to have Mantua provide our police services. It is the right thing to do and the time to act is now.

/John R. Dominy, Mayor