

Haddonfield Considers Shared Court Arrangement with Audubon

Early in 2009, the Commissioners began an examination of the advisability of a shared services arrangement for Haddonfield's Municipal Court. In the fall, the Borough agreed with Haddon Heights and Audubon to retain a consulting firm, Jersey Professional Management, Inc. ("JPM") to conduct a study of the costs and benefits of a shared court arrangement. JPM assembled information through the winter and the spring and presented the Commissioners with a report in April.

Although its methodology was flawed in significant respects and its conclusions therefore less reliable, the JPM report led to discussions among the three towns. After consideration, Haddon Heights determined that it did not wish to pursue a tripartite arrangement, but did wish to pursue an agreement with Haddonfield. Thereafter, the Haddonfield Commissioners requested that Audubon and Haddon Heights each submit a proposal to provide Municipal Court services to Haddonfield. These proposals were received in midsummer. The Audubon proposal was significantly more advantageous from a financial standpoint.

In addition, the Audubon facility, located in its Municipal Building on Nicholson Road, provides substantially more parking, a large and functional courtroom, up-to-date security precautions, and excellent prisoner-handling capabilities.

Borough Administrator Sharon McCullough estimates that the cost to Haddonfield of operating its own Municipal Court in 2011 will be approximately \$125,000, even assuming reduced fees for the Municipal Court judge, prosecutor and public defender. Audubon proposes to provide Municipal Court services for \$37,000 in the first year, \$38,500 in the second and \$40,000 in the third. All fines and costs for citations issued in Haddonfield will be remitted to Haddonfield on a periodic basis. The Haddonfield Police Department estimates that additional overtime costs related to the holding of court in Audubon will not exceed \$20,000 per year. Consequently, the savings to Haddonfield's taxpayers from such an arrangement are likely to exceed \$65,000 per year.

Audubon currently holds court sessions weekly on Monday mornings and it is anticipated that Haddonfield matters will be considered by the court at the same time. The Haddonfield Commissioners are considering whether to provide for an additional session, which would be held monthly in the evening, at an additional cost.

The JPM report and the Haddon Heights and Audubon proposals are on the Borough website.

At their September 14, 2010 meeting, the Commissioners will consider a resolution to authorize their solicitor to negotiate a three-year shared services agreement with Audubon.

Commissioner Edward F. Borden, Jr.
Director of Public Safety and Public Information