

THE VILLAGE OF STRAUSSTOWN MERGER

BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER TO LIVE HAPPY



CASE STUDY



COMMUNITY

The Village of Strausstown
(Formerly Upper Tulpehocken
Township and Strausstown Borough)

REGION

Berks County (Southeast PA)

POPULATION

342 (former Borough);
1,917 combined after merger

IMPACT

- Two municipalities consolidated into one
- Improved municipal services
- Taxes cut
- Additional revenues gained
- Government trust earned

“In this whole process, they’ve always had their eye on the horizon and the ultimate goal — one single community with the opportunity to provide various services. The current Township Board of Supervisors really kept themselves committed.”

— Paul Janssen, Director,
Albright College Center for
Excellence in Local Government

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE WITH A MURKY OUTLOOK

In 2014, the Strausstown Borough in Berks County was facing several major issues: it was forced to raise real estate taxes and sewer fees by more than 30 percent to eliminate budget deficits, and the Borough Council’s part-time staff was struggling to manage full-time services including street lights, trash collection, municipal issues, and a sewer system. Water wells were contaminated due to the density of housing with sewage tanks, and eventually, housing resales stopped because nobody had clean water. The Borough couldn’t afford its street lights and trash collection, especially with a Municipal Secretary working part-time at eight hours a week.

WORKING TOGETHER TO JOIN TOGETHER

Strausstown Borough Council President George Brown approached the Upper Tulpehocken Township Board of Supervisors in November 2014 and proposed to merge the Township and Borough. Paul Janssen and Albright College’s Center for Excellence in Local Government helped facilitate the 16-month review process, during which a merger committee — comprised of volunteers from both municipalities — was formed to conduct extensive research of resident concerns.

Ultimately, the committee’s recommendation was that the consolidation be put on the April 2016 Primary ballot. In contrast to an initially negative reaction from the Township, both the Township and the Borough passed the referendum with overwhelming majorities. Strausstown Borough would officially become part of Upper Tulpehocken Township, marking the fourth successful municipal consolidation in Berks County and officially forming the Village of Strausstown.

Officials credit the success of the consolidation to unparalleled collaboration between government entities, a completely transparent review process, and a robust educational outreach campaign.

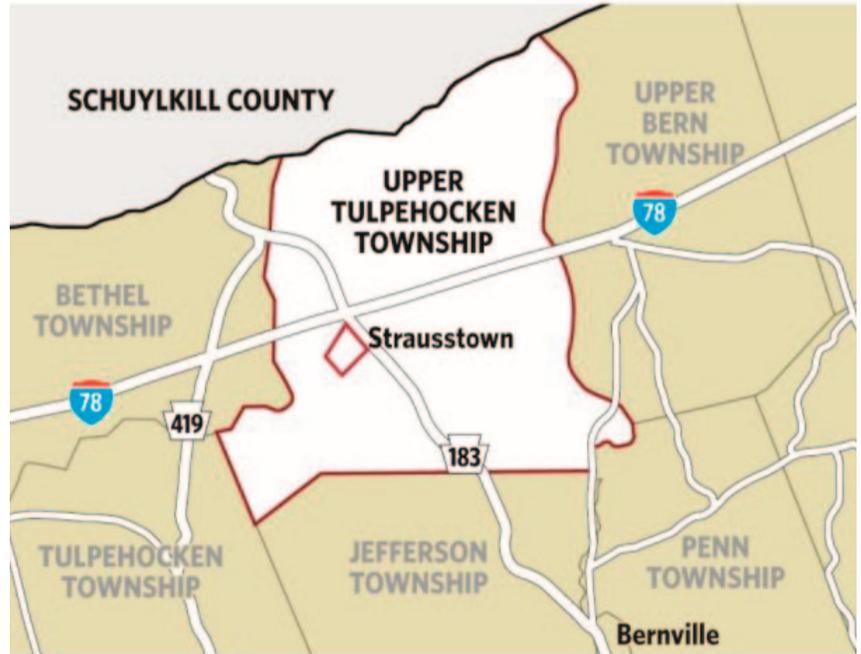
The consolidation was funded with assistance from the Berks County Commissioners and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), who funded an Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP) Grant, a program that helps struggling municipalities establish recovery plans and get back on track.

THE VILLAGE OF STRAUSSTOWN MERGER

A WIN-WIN SITUATION FOR THE VILLAGE OF STRAUSSTOWN

The successful merger, creating the Village of Strausstown, had a multitude of positive impacts for citizens:

- Continuation of all services in both communities, including full-service trash pickup, street lights, and a modern sewer plant for former Borough residents.
- Township administrative hours were expanded from 24 hours a week to 30 hours, plus two evenings a month. Formerly, Borough residents had access to office hours only eight hours a week.
- Former Borough residents effectively received a 40 percent tax reduction. In addition, a previously established Local Services Tax within the Borough was completely eliminated.
- Factoring in decreased taxes and increased services, the Township has received a net funding increase of \$47,500 annually – the equivalent of 75 percent of its pre-consolidation property tax assessment. This net gain has stalled any imminent tax increase for Township residents, and this money and more has been assigned to a long-term plan for road maintenance and reconstruction.



On July 1, 2016, officials held a ceremony in the former Borough, where they removed the Borough of Strausstown signs and replaced them with Village of Strausstown signs. And on March 30, 2017, both original municipalities were recognized for the manner in which they implemented the merger, earning the 2017 Richard C. Trostle Intergovernmental Cooperation Award.

Strategic Management Planning Program

The DCED Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP) Grant provides matching grant funds to assist municipalities experiencing fiscal difficulties to develop comprehensive multi-year financial plans and establish short- and long-term financial objectives. The program funds grants up to \$200,000 for 50 percent of total project cost, and applicants must provide a 50-percent match. Visit dced.pa.gov/stmp to learn more.