

# Morristown Shared Services Case Study

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**1. Municipal Characteristics**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Town of Morristown</b>	<b>Village of Morristown</b>	<b>Morristown Central School District</b>
2000 Population	2050	456	2695
Land Area (sq. mi.)	45.9	1.0	32.8
Assessed Value Fully Taxable	\$93,400,306	\$10,926,195	\$125,944,930
Full Valuation Taxable Real Property	\$93,400,306	\$11,607,558	\$128,286,041
Total Tax Levy	\$391,330	\$139,014	\$2,112,240
Total Debt Outstanding	\$164,139	\$1,709,733	\$5,203,200
Total State Aid Revenue	\$95,217	\$35,232	\$3,738,050
Total Revenue w/ State Aid	\$931,378	\$469,383	\$6,748,306
Debt Service	\$11,724	\$114,479	\$762,967
Total Expenditures w/ Debt Service	\$864,864	\$661,621	\$7,142,222

\*2004 data Office of the State Comptroller

## **2. Project Description & Impetus**

Due to the small size and rural location of Morristown, many services are difficult to distribute. The town and village do a very good job but struggle to make available what is necessary with little chance for growth. Residents routinely need to travel to Ogdensburg (10 miles), Gouverneur (20 miles), or Canton (25 miles, the County Seat) for services, medical attention, commerce, or recreation. The school district serves not only the village and most of the town but also portions of the Towns of Oswegatchie, Hammond, and Macomb.

Mr. Coffin and Ms. Ouderkirk were interviewed for this study due to their availability and knowledge of the project to date. The town supervisor deferred to Mr. Coffin as spokesperson for information about this grant. The village mayor was unavailable for an interview. Mr. Coffin and Ms. Ouderkirk were the primary authors of the grant application and therefore most knowledgeable about the proposed study.

## **3. Proposal(s) and Proposed Funding**

The proposed project is to conduct a feasibility study [to be funded with an SMSI grant] of all shared services that might make delivery of services more efficient and economical to the taxpayers and residents of a small rural community. No specific plans have been made except to collaborate in the feasibility study. As part of the feasibility study they will be working with consultants, attorneys, and officials of other municipalities who have conducted similar successful projects.

The Town and Village of Morristown as well as the local school district are always looking for ways to provide necessary services on a small budget. Some areas of overlap have been suspected and/or identified and cooperation is common when the arrangements can be made. However, questions of liability and supervision can make these handshake agreements problematic.

The total estimated cost of the project is \$60,000. Each of the co-applicants will contribute \$2000.

## **4. Legal Foundation and Legal Checklist**

No lawsuits are involved. The town passed a resolution agreeing to submit the grant application as lead applicant. No legal assistance was obtained for passage of this resolution. The village and school board were to pass resolutions in February 2006. Those resolutions have not been located. There have not yet been any contracts drafted or signed.

## **5. Views on the Issue**

### Arguments pro:

The town supervisor and village mayor are reportedly both in favor of the project as are all the local officials. Public comment at the three municipal board meetings has been favorable.

### Arguments Con:

At this time, because the only issue is to do the feasibility study, there has been no dissent. One area of concern is who would retain supervision authority if duplicated departments are merged.

### Local News Media Positions

There has been no news coverage while the project waits for the funding. The only press coverage to date is the announcement on 8/25/06 by Governor Pataki that the application had been approved.

## **6. Results**

The town and village received notice in August they had been approved for \$54,000 to study shared services. According to the Ogdensburg Journal on 8/25/06, the funds will be used to study general cooperation, and maintenance of vehicles, roads, and public works.

## **7. Implementation**

Chris Coffin of the town council heard about a grant opportunity for local governments to study shared services. Soon after that, School Superintendent and Trustee on the Village Council, Bev Ouderkirk, received an announcement that grant applications were being accepted. Working with other local officials, Mr. Coffin and Ms. Ouderkirk, on behalf of the village, town, and school district, applied for a NYS Department of State Shared Municipal Services Incentive Grant in January 2006. It was not mentioned if there was interaction with other organizations in preparing this grant.

Both Ms. Ouderkirk and Mr. Coffin stressed that no decisions have been made about what types of services would be effected. All parties want to be as open minded and innovative as possible. Procedures to hire a consultant to conduct the study have not begun. The town believes that it is not able to begin that process, including development of a Request for Proposals, until the grant funds are received.

At this point the major obstacle is the suspension of the project due to an unforeseen delay in receiving the grant funds. The local government representatives are concerned that they have lost momentum on what was seen as a very interesting project. They are looking for ways to rebuild the local support and enthusiasm once the contract and funding are received.

The project schedule agreed upon at the time of application is as follows:

According to the project schedule included in the grant application, a 6-member committee made up of 2 members of each co-applicant would begin work to hire a consultant immediately upon receipt of the grant funds. They expect a plan of action to be determined and implemented approximately 1year after receiving the funding for their study.

## **8. Expectations vs. Results**

n/a

## **9. Factors contributing to success/failure**

n/a

## **10. The 10 Step Program**

Not able to compare at this time.

## **11. Technical Assistance**

None as of yet. The members of the Morristown team are hopeful that some of the information gathered from the other case studies in the project might be made available to them.

## **12. List of Documents**

1. NYS Dept of State SMSI Grant Program 2005-2006 Application including resolution of Town Board.
2. Resolutions of the village and school board are not available.
3. Map of Morristown and vicinity

### **13. Additional comments/suggestions/helpful hints**

Mr. Coffin of the town board commented on the usefulness of this interview as an opportunity to discuss the potential project. They saw the project as in limbo since they did not have any idea of when they might move forward. Discussing the project again while they wait for the contracts and funding may be helpful to keep the enthusiasm alive.

Local officials wish they had understood from the start the timeline for a project like this. The delays in being able to begin their feasibility study were unforeseen.

### **14. Contacts**

#### **Municipal Contact:**

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