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## Voters back regionalization

BY MICHAEL P. BUFFER  
STAFF WRITER

**Pennsylvania voters want local governments to pool resources and jointly work on development and land-use issues, according to a statewide survey released last week by the Campaign to Renew Pennsylvania.**

But for that to happen, state laws need to change, said Luzerne County Commissioner Todd Vonderheid, director of strategy for RenewPA.

“People across Pennsylvania believe it’s time to unchain local governments from antiquated state laws that make it difficult for them to work together on common problems,” Vonderheid said.

He said state officials have expressed interest “in legislation that would do what we are talking about” since the survey results were released. Regulations and tax laws need to be changed to prevent municipalities from creating regional police departments and from putting more resources in older core communities, Vonderheid said.

“These out-of-date laws limit cooperation between governments on basic and critical functions such as police, fire, planning and public works,” Vonderheid said. “If local governments can’t work together, residents lose out and the results are aging infrastructure, declining services, higher taxes and lost opportunities.”

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, has been spearheading regionalization efforts in Luzerne County, and he said he plans to reintroduce legislation that would increase grant funding to encourage municipal cooperation. He said he also wants to remove complex barriers that prevent municipal pension systems from being combined.

The Campaign to Renew Pennsylvania is an initiative developed by 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania to help make local government more efficient.

“The timing is right for reform,” said Janet Milkman, president and CEO of 10,000 Friends.

Key findings from the survey are as follows:

- 95 percent believe local governments should collectively plan economic development efforts, transportation improvements and open space preservation.
- 64 percent believe local governments should be encouraged to pool resources to deliver local services, reduce waste and enhance economic development.
- 84 percent believe that regional police departments should be formed.
- Almost 90 percent agree that municipalities should be required to coordinate new development to reduce flooding from heavy rains.
- More than 70 percent of voters are more likely to support elected officials who support the

regionalization of municipal services.

- 91 percent of Pennsylvania voters believe that existing roads and bridges should be “fixed first.”
- Nearly 70 percent believe suburban communities should dedicate some portion of their taxes to pay for regional amenities in surrounding older communities.
- Nearly 70 percent believe development should be guided by comprehensive planning to prevent haphazard development.

[mbuffer@citizensvoice.com](mailto:mbuffer@citizensvoice.com)