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[NJ.com](#) - [News](#) - [Star-Ledger](#) - [Study opposes proposed Mt. Arlington cop merger](#) - [NJ.com](#)



## Study opposes proposed Mt. Arlington cop merger

Friday, October 19, 2007

**BY ROBERT E. WILLIAMS III**  
Star-Ledger Staff

A merger between the Mount Arlington Police Department with either Roxbury Township or Wharton would not benefit Mount Arlington residents, according to a study released yesterday.

The study, commissioned by a group of Mount Arlington residents opposed to a proposed merger, recommended the police department consider internal changes to its structure and policies to address concerns that the department is understaffed.

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Organizers of SaveMAPD contacted a California-based criminal defense attorney and policy analyst to review a Blue Shield Consultant study released last week that recommended merging the borough department with Roxbury Township or Wharton.

Wharton already provides a similar service to Mine Hill.

David Rubenstein, who helped organize the SaveMAPD campaign, said he viewed the Blue Shield study as opinion-based and not well supported.

"I was very worried that a decision would be made based on that report," said Rubenstein, a former 20-year Mount Arlington resident with family ties to the borough.

The SaveMAPD study criticized the method of analysis used in the Blue Shield study and cited several sets of financial and criminal statistical data not gathered as part of the consultant's report.

After reviewing the possibilities of mergers with Jefferson Township, Wharton and Roxbury Township, the SaveMAPD study found Mount Arlington was not understaffed when compared with agencies its size or when calculated with recommended state and national staffing averages.

The study also concluded the three proposed communities were understaffed when analyzed by state and national staffing averages, and that a merger with Wharton would cost an additional \$132,000 and the loss of three officers and a secretary.

The study recommended the borough review its internal structure and policy, including shifting its patrols to allow for double-manned cars during peak hours and single-manned cars during off-peak hours, using volunteers to help with department functions, hiring an additional officer to cover shift shortages, and obtaining federal grants to help cover the cost of hiring additional officers and buying technology to relieve officers overburdened with administrative functions.

Mount Arlington Mayor Arthur Ondish, who said he did not have a chance to review the report, said he welcomed its finding as part of the overall dialogue about the possible merger.

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"If it is the right thing, that's what we will do," said Ondish of the report's recommendation. "We are in the discovery phase to get feedback to make a logical decision, and we will make the decision that is best for the borough."

Ondish invited residents to attend a special council meeting on Monday at 7 p.m. at the Mount Arlington School to discuss the Blue Shield report.

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