



The of shared services

By Carl Golden | Posted: Tuesday, December 4, 2012 1:00 am

After years of relying on gentle persuasion and halfhearted incentives to convince municipal governments to reduce expenses by joining with neighboring communities to deliver services to their constituents, the Legislature appears poised to order shared-services agreements and punish those who refuse to comply by withholding a portion of their state aid allotment.

It's reminiscent of the old story about the farmer whose mule refused to pull the wagon. After cajolery and promises failed, the farmer delivered a thunderous blow between the animal's eyes with a 2-by-4.

"Will that make him modirection.

While that belief has held firm over many years, the steadily rising property tax burden and anger over a perceived inability to deal effectively with it has led to serious questioning about whether the rigidity of home rule should continue to stand in the way of saving taxpayer dollars.

Shared-services compacts have always been entered into voluntarily and have never become widespread. The overwhelming number of the state's 566 municipalities have opted to remain independent of one another while maintaining essentially duplicative administrative and management structures to deliver the same types of services.

Nativist sentiment and fears that local control and decision making will be lost if some government functions are shared have always been sufficiently strong to overcome the desire to operate more economically.

The legislation under consideration would create a state panel called the Local Unit Ali-74(e)etT(i)64itbv9.8(t)-1dfibv9.8(t)--6 municipal governments and, in collaboration with the Treasury Department, arrive at an estimated cost savings.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney of West Deptford, Gloucester County, the legislation's sponsor, has carved out a reputation as a leader in efforts to control property taxes, throwing the weight of his office fully behind the cap on tax rate increases, changes in the binding arbitration system for public safety personnel, and requiring public employees to contribute more to their pension plans and health benefits premiums.

