

Public authorities common in New Jersey, with little oversight, says Stockton professor

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comprehensive picture of the scope and impact of public authorities in New Jersey.”

“Even as we’ve moved toward more transparency in government, it is often difficult for the average citizen to discern what is going on at one of these authorities,” Carr said.

Here, local officials are awaiting word from the state’s Local Finance Board about whether or not the board supports the dissolution of the MUA. The July 16 hearing was attended by municipal officials as well as representatives from the MUA.

The Lower Township MUA was created in 1968 to provide water and sewer service for parts of the township. According to public data, the water system provides service to 7,000 residential customers and 600 commercial customers in an area of about two square miles. Sewer services, including wastewater collection and treatment services, reach some 13,000 customers – representing 80 percent of the township.

A May 5 report by an auditor found that the township could save close to \$1 million annually by dissolving the MUA and eliminating primarily administrative costs that would become duplicative once the authority’s services were absorbed into the municipal government.

The MUA’s 2014 budget was over \$10 million.

The report found that the services could continue at present levels, the authority’s indebtedness could be taken on without a tax increase, and that further savings may be located by consolidating facilities and insurance costs, as well as by sharing township-owned equipment among departments.

The report was commissioned by a unanimous council vote during a February closed session, following months of protests by employees regarding law enforcement investigations and mistreatment by management. Some \$150,000 was paid out to settle individual lawsuits that arose from those allegations in early May.

Republican councilmen Erik Simonsen and Thomas Conrad have disputed the figures in the report, and voted against dissolution at the introduction of an ordinance starting that process.

MUA solicitor Jeffrey Barnes said that the board would “absolutely” continue to oppose dissolution.

“There’s a statute governing dissolution, and the burden must be met by the proponent of dissolution,” he said. “We don’t think that the township has met that burden.”

Council is not scheduled to take further action on the proposed dissolution until after it receives the Local Finance Board’s decision.