



MERCER COUNTY, NJ

Shared Services

Cooperative Contract Purchasing System

Local government contracting units in Mercer County may voluntarily purchase under the awarded county contracts subject to the bid specifications, terms and conditions. Similar in concept to the State Cooperative Purchasing Program, the Cooperative Purchasing System may offer more competitive cost savings.

Recycling

The Mercer County Improvement Authority operates a curbside recycling program for residents and small businesses in 11 of its 13 municipalities. Twice a year the County provides a household chemical waste and household computer and electronics disposal day.

Emergency Management

State Police Communications Network

Last year, municipal representatives were invited to an informational forum cosponsored by New Jersey State Police and the County to discuss the discontinuance of the current network architecture between the State Police and 376 state municipalities. The State Police have mandated NJ Counties to serve as the hub for the Garden State Network (GSN) to their municipalities with implementation to be under way by July 2008.

The current system administered by the NJ Office of Information Technology (OIT) spends \$5.86 million annually to support this network with direct connections through the 376 fractional T1 circuit lines which burdens the state with service costs per line.

In order to reduce costs and consolidate lines for increased efficiency, the state has mandated for counties to take over direct connection to their municipalities. This new architecture will be more cost effective while continuing to provide current and secure applications that meet all standards. The County will encumber up front costs to install designated T1 lines to each municipality. Estimated costs savings to the state for Mercer County are \$114,084.

Emergency Communications System Upgrades for Municipalities

In 2008, through the initiation of inter-local agreements, the County will begin upgrading municipal emergency communications radio systems to become APCO 25 compliant. APCO 25 requires first responder's radios and dispatch systems to operate on narrow band frequencies. For many municipalities in Mercer County, it means replacing base stations and portable radios as well as licensing new frequencies once the old frequencies expire.

The County has already spent nearly \$2 million dollars of Homeland Security grant funds for a county wide APCO compliant digital trunked radio system and to date secured 7 digital frequencies. Municipalities will have their own radio and dispatch system with their own talk groups separate from all other municipalities. Yet, in a large scale emergency or mutual aid situation, first responders will be able to communicate with each other across municipal lines on the same system and effortlessly switch to common channels for seamless interoperability.

Police Academy

Opened in 2007 on the Mercer County Community College Campus, the Mercer County Police Academy provides training and recruitment for all municipal and county law enforcement agencies.

Dispatch

Mercer County Emergency Communications provides dispatch to 6 municipal fire communities and is looking to expand to more municipalities in fire and EMS centralized dispatch.

Emergency Preparedness Training

County provides needed training for municipalities and local leaders to be best equipped to respond in catastrophic emergency disaster incidents. In 2008, the County provided three crucial training programs for county and municipal staff, elected officials, and public safety representatives from educational institutions.

GIS and Aerial Pictometry

The County is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive network of GIS users cooperating at a regional level to share and maintain accurate up-to-date basic and essential data and make it available for use in planning processes in a variety of situations throughout the region.

GIS Database and Interactive Mapping Tools

Thematic data and maps will be used in both the short and long term for municipal growth management planning, innovative programs like Transfer of Development Rights, federal programs like the wetland mitigation bank program, grant applications, and other future planning programs that can be developed and realized through GIS. The shared GIS portal hosted and served by the County provides the data which municipal governments are primarily responsible for maintaining and keeping current.

Aerial Pictometry Images and Electronic Field Study Software

Mercer County has invested in two series of high quality aerial photography, along with software for locating and viewing the photos, adding notes, measuring distances, areas and heights, locating objects by latitude and longitude, and viewing GIS data layers. In 2008, the county provided external drives with the aerial pictometry software library and training to all of its municipalities.

Layers of use: Aerial imagery; parcel lines (with MOD IV data attached including zoning); road centerlines; business and institutional locations; environmental information (streams & DEP wetlands; contour elevations; parks and open space).

Municipal departments to benefit from these services are: Emergency Management (Police/Fire); Transportation/Highways; Engineering/Planning; Code Enforcement; Tax Assessors; and Parks & Recreation.

Records Management

In 2007, through PARIS Grant funds, the Mercer County Office of Records Management conducted a countywide records inventory and needs assessment on the status of records management practices, procedures and technology throughout County departments and agencies as well as within its municipalities. Copies of individual municipal assessments and recommendations were provided to each municipality along with a strategic plan.

The long-term goal of Mercer's Records Management initiative is for the County to become a hub for archives and records management by providing related services to its constituent municipalities and to implement records management shared services between municipal governments. The most vital component of such a program is a Records Storage Facility and Service Center.

Ten of the county's thirteen municipalities are committed to participate in the storage facility feasibility study which will determine the potential to retrofit or construct a new centralized storage facility that meets DARM (Division of Archives and Records Management) record storage requirements for county and municipal use. A shared facility will lower costs countywide by reducing the need to rely on third parties for records storage and maintenance. It will also provide more structured records monitoring process and environment.

County Clerk's Office E-Recording

In 2007, the Mercer County Clerk's Office began offering E-Recording functionality as a shared service. E-filing allows subscribers, such as banks, law firms, mortgage lenders and title companies, to communicate with the Mercer County Clerk's Office via the Internet, sending, receiving and tracking their records. No new fees are associated with E-Recording as it utilizes paperless filing of land records.

E-Recording also facilitates electronic records and information exchange between the County Clerk's office, the County Board of Taxation, and is to be tested in two pilot municipal Tax Assessors' offices. The shared E-Recording portal would permit the County Board of Taxation and municipal Tax Assessors' offices secured web-portal access to Deed and Mortgage records currently scanned and stored into the Land Records Management System (LRMS), a day-forward imaging system with State Records Committee (SRC) certification. The portal will also provide public records search via the web through a subscription based system.

Public Works

Provides ongoing routine road repairs and improvements, bridge repair and safety upgrades.

Equipment Inventory

Mercer County has developed an equipment inventory database accessible to all municipalities to encourage sharing versus purchasing equipment to help reduce costs.

Equipment & Safety Training Consolidation

The office of Shared Services is working with municipal public works departments to assist in coordinating safety training schedules that meet the demands for new employee, seasonal and on-going trainings. Municipalities that participate in a Joint Insurance Fund (JIF) with Municipal Excess Liability (MEL) coverage are required to conduct their trainings through the MEL Safety Institute (MSI). We are working with these municipalities to piggyback and consolidate their trainings. Municipalities not participating in a JIF are encouraged to piggyback on County sponsored trainings.

Vehicle Wash Facility

The County is also working with municipalities to assess their current vehicle wash facility needs and compliance to DEP stormwater regulations. We are currently exploring all options for retrofitting existing facilities and the construction of a new regional facility.

Transportation

Mercer County Transportation Service (MCTS) is administered in and out of public and private schools through the Special Services School District providing services to most municipalities.

Route 130 Connection Bus Service provided by the County offers convenient transportation up and down the Route 130 corridor providing these services to 4 municipalities along the corridor.

Transportation Resources to Aid the Disadvantaged and Elderly (TRADE) provides non-emergency transportation to county residents who are elderly (age 60+) and to people with

disabilities. TRADE provides a safe, efficient and economical paratransit service to all eligible residents by trained staff dedicated to the passenger's special needs. An agreement to share services was reached by Mercer County's TRADE program and ARC Mercer, one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the County.

"Arc Trans," is the result of efforts to coordinate all major human service transportation providers in the County to better coordinate transportation services identified in the Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan (HSTCP) completed in 2007.

Weights and Measures

The Office of Weights and Measures conducts routine inspections of local measurement equipment such as gas pumps and supermarket scales throughout most of our municipalities to assure regulatory compliance and peace of mind for residents. The office recently executed a shared service agreement to provide services to the county's largest municipality.

Parks & Recreation

Mercer at Play Program

Purchased in 2008, Twin Pine Airport, a 51-acre airstrip and one of the nation's oldest grass-strip airports where Charles Lindbergh once landed down will soon become a shared recreational area serving four municipalities. The airport is being converted into playing fields to be owned by four towns -- Hopewell Borough and Township, Lawrence and Pennington.

The county's Mercer at Play program matches municipal contributions for outdoor recreational facilities and doubles the match when municipalities apply for a grant funding support together.

County Connection

Is an innovative outreach center providing a wide range of county government agency information and services at a convenient alternate regional location with evening and weekend hours and access to public transportation. The 2,100 square foot store front includes a community meeting room available to local groups, organizations and municipal government. Public access computers are available. There are also private areas for passport applications provided by the County Clerk's office. The County Connection offers regularly scheduled programs from Veterans Services, the Office on Aging, Mercer County Community College, New Jersey Small Business Development Center, Consumer Affairs and many other local and government agencies. A calendar of events is available monthly. In its first year, the County Connection processed more than 4,000 passports, distributed 1,500 recycling buckets, performed 500 notaries, held countless community meetings, marriage ceremonies, provided free assistance to Medicare beneficiaries and free tax assistance.

Other Shared Services

The County regularly funds projects with and for its municipalities and offers ongoing shared services that include:

- In 2006, the County consolidated the positions of Superintendent for Special Services School District and Vocational Technical School into one position.
- Preservation of open space and farmland through funding provided by the Open Space Trust Fund and in combination with municipal funding.
- Our countywide Mosquito control program that includes stocking fish in approximately 30 self-contained waterways throughout the county and municipalities.
- The One-Stop Career Center provides municipal job fairs annually throughout municipal locations connecting local job seekers to prospective companies.

For more information on Mercer County's Shared Services, contact Nancy Coffee, Shared Services Coordinator, (609) 989-6722 / ncoffee@mercercounty.org