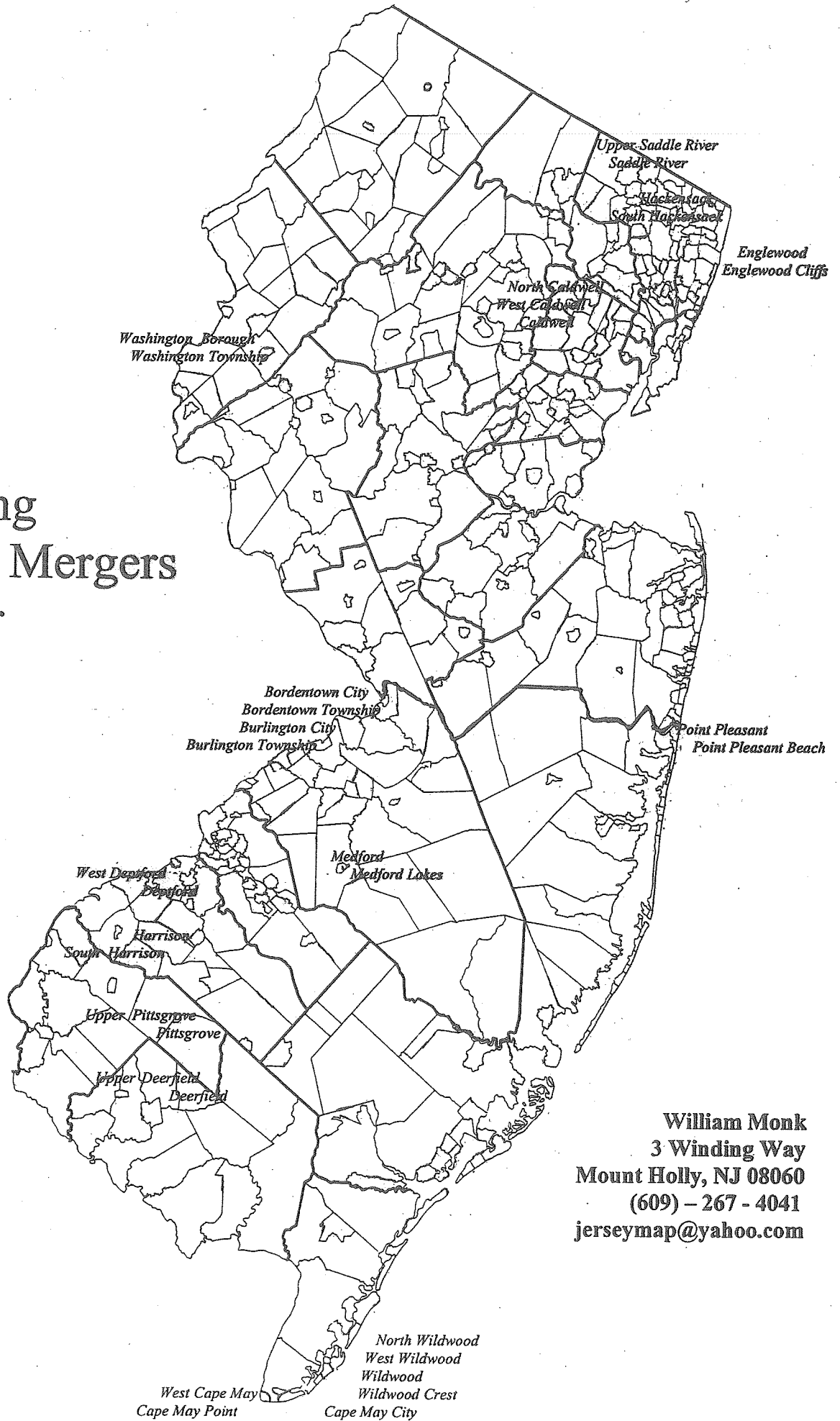


Making Town Mergers Easier



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Problems

- The Smith – Wisniewski committee is only considering “Big Government” solutions (base closing commission, 21 county superintendents) that will inspire lawsuits, and years of delay
- Consolidations should have broad public involvement – which requires more than just a referendum at the end
- Current laws make municipal consolidations difficult
 - Voters can only petition for a study commission (NJSA 40:43-66.39)
 - The commission must be approved by voters in every town (40:43-66.44)
 - The commission decides town name and form of government (40:43-66.50)
 - Petitioners have no guarantee of a final vote on consolidation
 - Small towns get veto power throughout the process

Answers

- Repeal laws requiring a study commission (40:43-66.41-58)
- Combine current laws (40:43-66.39, 66.40, and 66.59) to let petitions lead directly to a public vote on merger
- Let petitions name new town, and form of government
- Do not require all towns to approve, but allow merger in any town where voters approve
- Towns are not forced to merge, but cannot prevent other mergers
- Amend NJSA 18A:8 to allow public to petition for direct vote on school district mergers

The Wildwoods: a case study

The towns of North Wildwood, West Wildwood, Wildwood City, and Wildwood Crest form a contiguous area in Cape May County.

West Wildwood has a population of 436; the other towns have populations between 3,900 and 5,300. West Wildwood is landlocked; the other towns are on the ocean.

Wildwood and North Wildwood are cities; West Wildwood and Wildwood Crest are boroughs.

North Wildwood has partisan municipal elections and a mayor-7 council government; the other towns have non-partisan elections and use a 3 member commission government.

All towns send children to Wildwood City's School District.

With petitions leading to a direct vote:

- ❖ Voters in four towns could petition to merge into one ["Wildwood Township"], with a common election date and form of government
- ❖ If West Wildwood (or any town) votes no, it remains unchanged, but if the other three vote yes, they would become Wildwood Township.
- ❖ There could be a later vote, to merge West Wildwood with Wildwood Township, without affecting results of the first merger.
- ❖ Other mergers are possible: One town could join Wildwood City while the other two became Wildwood Borough, or stayed as they are, but in these cases there would still be two or three municipalities, instead of four.
- ❖ No municipality is forced into merger, or denied the chance at merger