As Pittsburgh faces its worst financial crisis in decades, a foundations-funded study goes

By Jim Davidson
Illustrations by Jud Guitteau

BORDER CROSSING

past boundaries to flush out the metro killers: pinched politics, fragmented government and ever-widening sprawl.

It was the evening of Dec. 9 in the cavernous ballroom of the new International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers hall, built on a brownfield occupied not so long ago by Jones & Laughlin's South Side Works. More than 300 people had turned out on a bitingly cold Tuesday to hear a parade of sworn witnesses tell Pennsylvania's secretary of community and economic development why Pittsburgh should be ruled a financially distressed community under Act 47, the state's more palatable alternative to municipal bankruptcy.

Many in the audience had a vested interest in the proceedings, especially firefighters and other city employees, past and present. Some were among the 640 who had been laid off in November as Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy made a game but fruitless attempt to balance the city's 2004 budget. This was a tough crowd. Yet they would clap for David Roderick, lately the co-chair of the Public Financial Management commission, who never heard that kind of applause in the 1980s when he was running U.S. Steel and shutting down the local mills. The crowd would

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His last story, in the spring 2003 issue, was an introduction to the Endowments' Civic Design Initiative.

clap even longer after real estate mogul Howard Hanna III held up a chart illustrating the property tax bills now being paid by the new owners of three $200,000 homes—$540 per month in the city's North Side neighborhood, $332 per month in the old suburb of Ross Township and a mere $254 per month in the new suburb of Cranberry, just outside the Allegheny County line. City Councilmen Sala Udin and Alan Hertzberg, along with City Controller Tom Flaherty, all drew similar audience approval for chiming in with tales of fiscal woe.

There was no applause, however, after Mayor Murphy, the evening's first speaker, laid out his financial view. Relentlessly positive, even in the midst of fiscal crisis, he described Pittsburgh as a "comeback city…burdened by a tax system of 50 years ago" and now about to go broke as city officials scrambled to fund a $440 million budget with less than $400 million in projected revenues. In his rough-and-tumble political career, Murphy had won enough votes to be elected mayor three times and a state legislator eight times before that, but on this night there was silence as he left the podium, save for the sounds of squirming in the seats. Murphy, it was clear, was getting precisely the treatment that distressed Pennsylvania communities get from their neighbors. Not hostility, not sympathy, not a helping hand, not an offer to sit down and talk about working together—none of that. Murphy just got the cold shoulder.

That's the way it is in Pennsylvania. The more a community appears to be sinking, the less likely its neighbors will be to throw a lifeline. Public officials recognize that drowning swimmers have a tendency to drag their rescuers down with them. Just ask politicians in Scranton, Johnstown, Wilkinsburg, Duquesne, Braddock, North Braddock, Clairton, Rankin, Aliquippa and the rest of the 19 communities that have been granted relief under Act 47 since the law took effect in 1987.

But when a city the size of Pittsburgh is floundering in a sea of red ink and grasping for Act 47, a lot of uncomfortable questions bubble up, most of them posed away from the microphones of a public hearing. How does a city with as sound a basic economy as any other its size in the post-industrial northeast land in such peril? What are the structural problems leading to such a collapse, and which leaders have the political engineering skills to repair the damage?

In a region packed with tiny municipal fiefdoms, which leaders have the political courage to rethink their boundaries? Which leaders are willing to think regionally and confront the long-standing antipathies that have led municipalities to spiral into insolvency: borough bureaucrats against city hall politicos; urban against rural; city against suburb; big box development against central city rejuvenation?

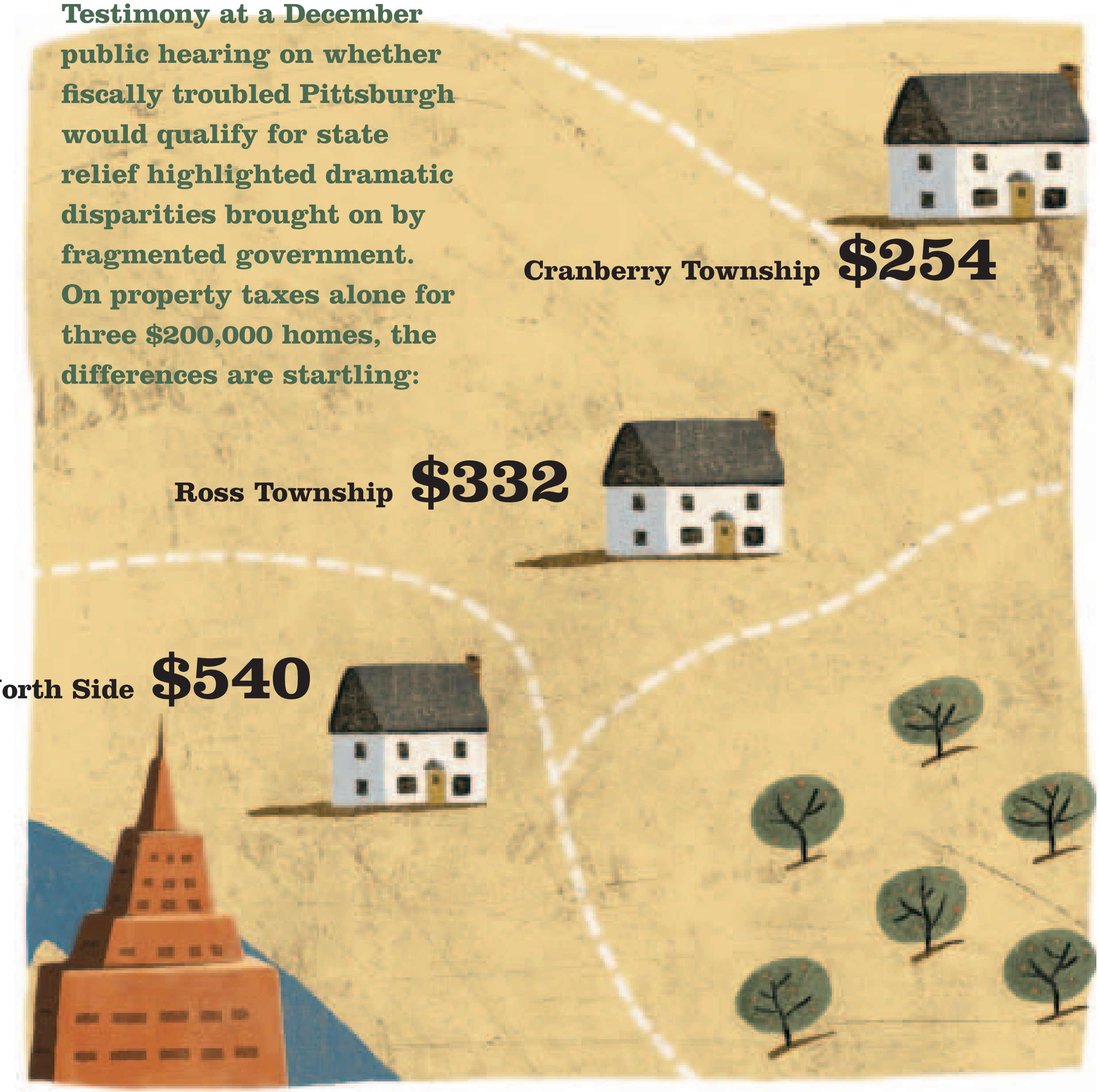
These questions are part of a fierce tug-of-war between suburban Republican state legislators and Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell, a Murphy ally and Pittsburgh supporter. The result, so far, has been something of a win for the pro-city side —a two-track fiscal reform plan that makes it likely the city will be allowed to raise new tax revenue, including enacting a commuter tax. The first is Act 47 designation coordinated by a prominent local law firm and a Philadelphia municipal management company. The second, is a governor–legislature-approved fiscal oversight board empowered to develop a financial restructuring plan for the city within 60 days.

Lines in the Sand. Under Act 47, the state appoints a fiscal manager who oversees creation of a recovery plan, and there's financial assistance in the form of loan guarantees and, in the case of Johnstown, authorization to levy a payroll tax on nonresidents who work in the city. The system is built on a philosophy of self-help and at the end of a process that typically takes 10 years, the municipality still finds itself facing dire problems alone. "If there is one municipality in crisis, they're an orphan," says Karen Miller, executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League state office. "You can fix mismanagement under Act 47. You can't really fix the economic base."

The morning after the hearing, the newspapers played up a new report on Pittsburgh's finances while ignoring the substance of the presentations by Murphy, Udin, Hertzberg and Flaherty. The stories had a line or two about their complaints that the Pennsylvania Legislature had never seen fit to direct a commuter tax to the city of Pittsburgh, leaving only a 1960s-era occupation tax of $10 per head on suburbanites. There was no mention of the speakers' complaint that the Legislature has exempted Pittsburgh's largest corporations from the business privilege tax that brings the city about $40 million per year in revenues.

TAXING PROBLEM

Testimony at a December public hearing on whether fiscally troubled Pittsburgh would qualify for state relief highlighted dramatic disparities brought on by fragmented government. On property taxes alone for three $200,000 homes, the differences are startling:



While Murphy had endorsed some of the exemptions in previous terms, he shook his head at the current inequity during his address at the hearing. “The neighborhood dry cleaner pays more than large multinational corporations,” he said. And Flaherty followed up by pointing out that 26 of the city’s 27 largest businesses are exempt from the tax, and so are jewelers, takeout pizza shops and other industries that successfully lobbied the Legislature. In addition, Flaherty said, the Legislature had sent a clear signal to Pittsburgh’s universities and hospitals that they could stop worrying about making payments in lieu of taxes to defray the cost of city services they used. Those payments had been running about $6 million per year, but have since dwindled to $600,000 and are expected to disappear altogether. “What people don’t seem to realize is this city is going to be out of cash,” Roderick said at the hearing, explaining that it takes more than $1 million a day to run Pittsburgh. Just in attempting to honor a $7 million biweekly payroll, the city could deplete its $21 million reserve fund before spring.

No one in the hall stood up when a panelist asked if any state legislators were present, although at least four had sent written comments for the record. By the next day, however, legislators Jeff Habay and Mike Turzai, both Republicans from the Pittsburgh suburbs, reacted with a polite yawn by characterizing Pittsburgh’s crisis as a creature of Murphy’s

Three-term Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy waits his turn to testify at a state Act 47 hearing in December to determine whether the city qualifies for financially distressed status. Murphy is a supporter of the eventual outcome: a two-track financial rescue plan that includes an Act 47 management team and a separate oversight board approved by state legislators and Gov. Ed Rendell.

own making. In the state Senate, Democrat Jack Wagner and Republican Jane Orie were plunging daggers into the recommendations of the Public Financial Management Committee run by Republican CEO Roderick and philanthropist Elsie Hillman, the grand dame of Pennsylvania Republican politics and close friend of the Bush family.

The fact that Wagner, a former city councilman, ignored a recovery plan worked out by Gov. Rendell and Murphy and proposed his own, and that Orie, the designated broker by state Republican legislative leaders, was bucking a party luminary like Hillman, only highlights the fissures across city, suburban and state boundaries.

The turf standoff grew so hostile, in fact, that the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* served as a dueling ground, with the normally moderate Hillman charging that Orie "has left us high and dry" and Orie firing back in an opinion piece that she would continue to maintain her "…strong opposition to new revenue sources [for the city]," meaning that she would protect her constituents from any hike in the occupation tax, and also toe the line set by her Senate leadership. State Sen. Sean Logan, a Democrat representing suburban Monroeville, also piled on. "The Hillman committee are the people who have business with the city of Pittsburgh, and [are] the organizations or businesses exempted from the business privilege tax, so I'm not real comfortable in their numbers and their theories and proposals."

Even freshly elected County Executive Dan Onorato, whose governing ground runs through city and suburb, came out against Act 47. "[It] would be a major black eye for this region," he told interviewers on a Sunday morning TV news show. But he was quick to declare that the time had come for merging city and county government functions. "At the end of the day, we will have consolidation completed," he vowed, and promised that the city and county would "get to the same page" on the issue after he took office.

As a result of the hearing, state Economic Development Secretary Dennis Yablonsky declared Pittsburgh distressed under Act 47 and chose, no doubt with the mayor's input, the prominent Pittsburgh law firm of Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott and Public Financial Management of Philadelphia to develop the city's recovery plan. While savings through shared services and consolidation with the county will certainly be part of the plan, already Onorato has fixed some boundary lines around his original consolidation philosophy.

In early January, in the first test of city–county cooperation, Onorato rejected a proposal to save the city $800,000 by taking over a police fingerprinting program, as requested in the pared-down $387 million budget that City Council passed Dec. 31. In a letter to Murphy, Onorato set the terms for any form of consolidation, merger or cooperation between the city and county: Whatever the proposal, it had to result in a true net savings for city and county, not just a cost shifting from one government to another. So the tug-of-war over the degree of consolidation resumes and more questions emerge: Will the state approve governance and tax structure changes? Will those reforms ripple outward to other municipalities, or will the Legislature spurn the state's second-largest city, leaving it to manage its decline?

The Wider View. While few answers are emerging from the political bickering, a project led by two private foundations is offering some solutions in a state-of-the-state view of land use and governing. Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution has provided a rallying point with a new study, funded by The Heinz Endowments and the Philadelphia-based William Penn Foundation, "Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania." The study confirms what many academics, analysts and policymakers already believed, that Pittsburgh is suffocating under Pennsylvania's crazy quilt of fractured government: 670 counties, 56 cities, 962 boroughs, 91 first-class townships and 1,457 second-class townships. Lay on the 501 school districts, and hundreds more police–fire departments and water–sewer authorities and it's a wonder that any layer of government can function. "Basically a government structure designed for the 18th century, not the 21st," Katz said.

NATIONAL BEST DISTRESSED LIST

While a 1934 federal law enables municipalities to be declared bankrupt, it has been used only a dozen times, according to government records—and mostly by small communities. Bridgeport, Conn., and Camden, N.J., are usually cited as the only "sizeable" cities to file in the past 25 years. The largest municipal bankruptcy to date is a county—Orange, Calif., in 1994. That case stemmed from investment fund managers playing fast and loose with financial derivatives. Taxpayers lost many millions of dollars in the scandal.

Other U.S. cities have teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, but managed to right themselves with a combination of government bailouts and financial oversight teams. Some of the recovered face new financial woes:

Buffalo, 2003

Under control of state financial oversight board since summer. (This year, city will be forced to borrow to cover $24 million deficit.)

Cleveland, 1978

Defaulted on $15 million in bank loans; recovered through state assistance. (This year, 250 police, 70 firefighters laid off to close $61 million deficit.)

New York City, 1975

Federal government guaranteed $1.65 billion in loans.

Philadelphia, 1989–1990

Oversight board with power over city finances created in 1991. (This year, city's deficit projected to reach $144 million.)

Pennsylvania's Fiscally Challenged

Of 20 municipalities that have sought Act 47 protection—and oversight—since the law was passed in 1987, only five have recovered.

Allegheny County

Borough of Braddock—June 15, 1988
City of Clairton—Jan. 19, 1988
City of Duquesne—June 20, 1991
Borough of East Pittsburgh—Nov. 13, 1992; Rescinded Dec. 27, 1999
Borough of Homestead—March 22, 1993
Borough of North Braddock—May 22, 1995; Rescinded April 11, 2003
City of Pittsburgh—Dec. 29, 2003
Borough of Rankin—Jan. 9, 1989
Borough of Wilkinsburg—Jan. 1, 1988; Rescinded Nov. 10, 1998

Beaver County

City of Aliquippa—Dec. 22, 1987
Borough of Ambridge—April 10, 1990; Rescinded April 16, 1993

Cambria County

Borough of Franklin—July 26, 1988
City of Johnstown—Aug. 21, 1992

Delaware County

City of Chester—April 6, 1995
Borough of Millbourne—Jan. 7, 1993

Lackawanna County

City of Scranton—Jan. 10, 1992

Luzerne County

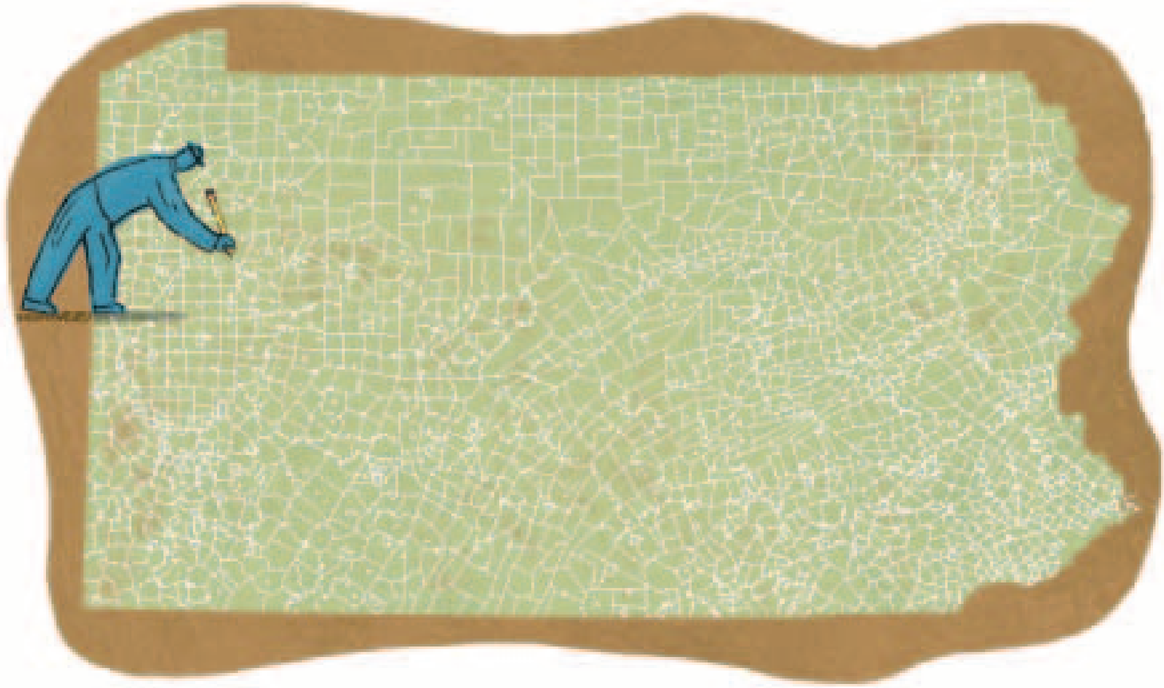
Borough of West Hazleton—March 29, 2003

Mercer County

Borough of Greenville—May 8, 2002
City of Farrell—Nov. 12, 1987

Schuylkill County

Borough of Shenandoah—May 20, 1988; Rescinded April 16, 1993



DRAWING THE LINE

This map of Pennsylvania, taken from a Brookings Institution report on key issues holding the state back from prosperity, shows the result of 100-plus years of fractured government: 670 counties, 56 cities, 962 boroughs, 91 first-class townships and 1,457 second-class townships. "...[A] government structure designed for the 18th century, not the 21st," says Brookings Vice President Bruce Katz.

As hands-on director of the study, and with deep experience in the workings of politics and government bureaucracy, there was no one better than Katz to publicize the report's dramatic findings at forums around the state. On the morning of Dec. 9, hours before the Act 47 hearings, Katz spoke before about 200 Pittsburgh community leaders at the Omni William Penn and laid out some dire conclusions about sprawl, growth, the flight of young people and weak planning. Underlying all of these is the fragmented system of municipal government. "To put it bluntly," the Brookings report says, "Pennsylvania possesses one of the nation's most labyrinthine systems of state and local government—and that has exacerbated unbalanced growth patterns and undercut economic competitiveness." In his public remarks, Katz made the blunt tone of the report seem charitable. "You lack a coherent strategy for growth and development," he said. "It's all about politics in this state. It's not about vision."

Publication of the Brookings Institution report got the city talking to a degree that few think-tank studies had in the past. Katz describes the dilemma facing a state operating under the double whammy of economic stagnation and rapid sprawl as it spins its population into low-density townships beyond the periphery of the state's 14 metropolitan areas. Pennsylvania, he says, has been cannibalizing its own population, wastefully building roads and other infrastructure to serve exurbanites, rather than capitalizing on policies to revitalize cities, build on brownfields and otherwise preserve the kinds of amenities that might stanch its losses of skilled young people and jobs. Katz calls for Pennsylvania to capitalize on its substantial resources as a national leader in what he calls "eds and meds"—the universities, colleges and medical institutions that generate high-paying jobs for an educated workforce.

The seriousness of the problems and the fervor of the debate have sparked hopes that this time, maybe, finally, this time, the region can explore new ways of doing business. Businesses seeking to relocate have become adept at playing state against state, region against region, municipality against municipality, as they seek the best deals in land, loans, zoning and tax relief. A region with a Balkanized government structure will inevitably find itself competing against itself—and working at a disadvantage for states and regions with a more coherent approach. "How you govern will affect how you compete," Katz said. "If you govern from 2,565 municipalities, you will not be able to compete."

The Heinz Endowments maintains an Economic Opportunity Program focused on regional growth and improvement of the regional economy to establish jobs. There is also an environmental program addressing such issues as land-use planning, smart growth, transportation and water issues. Though, in both cases, says Endowments President Maxwell King, "We find that in economic opportunity efforts and environmental efforts we're almost paralyzed in trying to deal with local government. We look at the complex fabric and really don't know where to begin to work with it."

King says the "inefficiencies and ineffectiveness" of local government are one of the main stumbling blocks in the region, along with the poor quality of public education and the dismal state of diversity. He believes it is critical for the region to find its own way through the labyrinth. "I've come to believe it's never going to happen on a statewide level. It's not going to happen until one region takes the bull by the horns and finds a solution, and I believe we can be that region."

To that end, the Endowments and regional foundation partners such as the Richard King Mellon and Pittsburgh Foundations, have been steady funders of government efficiency improvement efforts, think-tank studies and good-government training programs run by respected grantees like the Pennsylvania Economy League and the universities. The Endowments alone has spent more than $1 million on these efforts since the late 1990s. "Some of the funding is based on a strategy that better-trained elected officials are more likely to make policy that doesn't sacrifice the forest for the benefit of one grove of trees," says Endowments Economic Opportunity Program Director Brian Kelley. "But other funding has gone to developing solid information on how bad the problem of fragmented government is in southwestern Pennsylvania and why people need to be concerned."

What's Wrong With Pennsylvania? A great deal of the foundations' public education effort has been in highlighting how much more cluttered Pennsylvania's municipal landscape is than most other states.

Maryland, in the 1960s, abandoned its patchwork of tiny municipalities and made its 15 counties the basic units of governance, each with authority over schools, police, fire and other basic services. It's not unusual for a city and a county to have the same borders—Philadelphia has long been such a city. Yet there has been new movement as cities like Jacksonville, Indianapolis, Charlotte and, most recently, Louisville have united with their counties through annexation or consolidation. (See "Louisville's Big Hit," page 22.)

Change does not come easily in Pennsylvania. For one thing, every square inch of the state is contained within an existing city, borough or township, and there has been little shift in boundaries since the 1800s when most were drawn. This means that, as Pennsylvania cities have expanded, they have been barred from incorporating new land. All of it already was legally incorporated. And as some older Pennsylvania boroughs and townships went broke and emptied out, they had nowhere to turn. Under state law, consolidation is so cumbersome that few municipalities have attempted it. Nor do municipalities have the option of simply locking the doors and going out of business, as they do in many states. In Georgia, for instance, the legislature passed a law designating seven basic municipal services—fire, police, schools and so forth—and providing for municipalities to be dissolved if they did not provide four of the seven services. When 37 small municipal governments subsequently dissolved, their county governments assumed authority.

"The fact is that all of [Pennsylvania's] local governments exist because the state says they exist," says Dennis McManus, director of the Institute of Politics at the University of Pittsburgh. While governments at all levels have an interest in perpetuating themselves, they may not necessarily have an interest in the health of their neighbors. It takes courage, McManus says, for elected officials to reach across boundaries on behalf of people who aren't in a position to vote for them. "Where I see promise is in the increasing numbers of success stories—even locally—where they've reached across the border and lived to tell about it."

McManus cites such cooperative efforts behind the 83-municipality Three Rivers Wet Weather Demonstration Project and the Region 13 Counter-Terrorist Task Force.

As new initiatives, they can erect a new layer of governance that breaks down turf boundaries. Down below, however, the hard bedrock of fragmented municipalities lies undisturbed. Retail developers know this, and have managed to build new developments wherever they see fit—a process King derides as "playing off the fragments instead of bringing the pieces together." In this regard, the Katz report faults the state Municipalities Planning Code for not requiring zoning ordinances to conform to local or regional plans. In effect, nothing stands in the way of a developer choosing to build on fallow greenfields distant from the city center rather than on vacant brownfields. "Older municipalities are subsidizing their own decline," Katz notes, pointing out that Pittsburgh now has nearly as many jobs as it has residents—97 jobs for every 100 city dwellers. Yet, aside from a paltry $10-a-year occupation tax dating back to 1966, nonresident workers pay nothing.

Consolidation Conundrum. Local government merging might appear sensible and rational, but that doesn't mean it's a straightforward process. It can be accomplished only when one body is on the verge of collapse, or when the two bodies are on equal economic footing. "What we ran into in the Mon Valley," remembers Miller, of the Pennsylvania Economy League, "was you would just have a bigger municipality in crisis." The more serious the distress, in other words, the harder it is to consolidate with another municipality.

That's what happened a decade ago after Franklin Borough, outside Johnstown in Cambria County, filed for Act 47 distressed status. During the reorganization, Franklin residents raised the possibility of petitioning Johnstown to take back a borough that long ago had separated itself from the city. As the decision ground through the machinery of government, however, Johnstown itself filed for Act 47 status, and the question of consolidation became moot. The courtship ended with neither municipality willing to take on the other's problems.

Municipalities gained a new tool last year that may prove useful in consolidations. As David Rusk, former mayor of Albuquerque, N.M., and author of the 1993 critically acclaimed *Cities Without Suburbs*, explains in a background paper released with the Brookings study, House Bill 77 permits citizens of "multiple adjacent municipalities" to initiate a referendum to elect a joint government study commission. That body would be empowered to develop a new home rule charter that includes structural and fiscal consolidation. In the past, the state did not permit citizens to take the initiative; instead, they had to work through their "existing government bodies," which had entrenched elected officials dedicated to keeping their power.

Today, however, consolidation is being explored by five small municipalities outside Johnstown—the boroughs of Daisytown, East Conemaugh and Franklin, and the townships of Conemaugh and East Taylor. State law, however, requires that consolidations be approved by a majority in each affected municipality—a requirement that militates against any consolidation as complex as this one. One of Katz's recommendations in the Brookings report is to change the law so that a consolidation could be approved by a simple majority of voters in the entire consolidated district.

One government gift in the Act 47 legislation is an empowerment for distressed municipalities to collect a commuter tax. In 1994, Johnstown began collecting 0.5 percent of residents' pay and 0.4 percent of nonresidents' pay, gradually scaling them down in recent years to 0.2 percent for residents and 0.1 percent for nonresidents. The city has been careful to direct the money—averaging about $1 million per year—not toward payrolls but toward the purchase of tangible items such as a dump truck and a $400,000 firetruck.

The state Center for Local Government Services has touted Johnstown as a poster child for the salutary effects of Act 47. In 1993, it was more than $3 million in debt and was running an operating deficit of $463,000. Nine years later, it had a surplus of $750,000 and had operated in the black for five consecutive years, and without raising taxes for five years. Johnstown adopted a vision statement that reads "Be so good at what we do that we create compelling reasons for surrounding boroughs and townships to cooperate," yet it remains under Act 47 and faces an uncertain future. Its unemployment rate surged above 8 percent, the highest in the state, following a bankruptcy filing by Republic Technologies in Franklin Borough and the shutdown of the Bestform Inc. bra factory and distribution centers in Johnstown and Windber.

Freshly elected and full of promise, Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato takes his oath of office Jan. 2, as wife, Shelly, and daughter, Emily, look on. As the region's top public official, Onorato has promised an action plan on government consolidation, but longtime members of his own Democratic Party may prove most resistant to change.

Short of consolidation, the merging of government functions and services is an approach with a built-in appeal: Everyone wants to save money.

By merging their 911 systems—a cumbersome but ultimately successful process—Pittsburgh and Allegheny County not only improved service but expect to save $6 million annually. And County Executive Onorato is pursuing cost savings on several fronts, starting with a proposed merger of county police and sheriff's departments. The city and county have also taken steps to do more joint purchasing, spurred by a recent study done by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The final report estimates that a county–city partnership on purchasing could save $9 million to $15 million per year.

"Joint purchasing has come out of this," says Kathryn Klaber, the Conference vice president who has guided the project. "We're identifying areas where people can buy things on one another's contracts."

In terms of consolidation, "I saw what we did as a building block," says Klaber. "It's one small example of where there are good business reasons for doing this, but we can't extrapolate from this to the big picture and a vision of what we're going to be in three decades. It would be premature."

But the Endowments' Kelley warns, "It has to be more than 'Let's buy salt together.' "

Beyond Obstacles. As Katz stepped from the podium after presenting the Brookings report, he was succeeded by Endowments Environment Program Director Caren Glotfelty who, along with The William Penn Foundation's Kathryn Engebretson and Geraldine Wang, had coordinated its preparation. "The most important thing," Glotfelty told the group, "is what happens next."

One fate yet to be determined is that of the American city itself. Many regard the city as a place to work and as a center for sports and cultural events, but beyond these, there are no connections. Many think of themselves as living somewhere else entirely.

The Brookings report subscribes to an expansive definition of the city, as an "elastic" entity whose borders stretch to the far edges of the contiguous suburban neighborhoods. Katz marshals evidence to show that such cities have fared better economically in the recent past than cities with inelastic borders. So, it's a hopeful sign when a person from Butler or Monessen identifies himself or herself as being from Pittsburgh, or when that person writes "Pittsburgh PA" next to a ZIP code from the far reaches of the county. City residents, for their part, tacitly acknowledge that Pittsburgh is the place they want to live. As Mark Schneider, president of the Rubinoff Co., a major developer, said in his testimony at the South Side hearing, "People will pay a premium to live in a great city."

As a result of the city's ongoing fiscal crisis, "people are going to see the clear advantage in cooperation as opposed to going it alone, and not only in terms of improving efficiency," says Institute of Politics Director McManus. If you can also show that consolidations improve quality of life, he says, they may, in the end, prove politically feasible.

The Endowments' Maxwell King takes it a step further, believing Pittsburgh's fiscal crisis and the unprecedented new conversations about consolidation are markers on a path leading to the re-establishment of pride in place. "I really feel the time is perfect for the community to think about this and act on this. There's a growing awareness of the problems of city finances, but there's also a condition right now that forces us to confront more important questions about place and identity. Do we want a healthy, vibrant city? And if we do, what should the city look like and how should it function in order to serve the greatest good?"

There is a long list of regions that, during similar periods of financial crisis, have blown opportunities to redefine their relationship to a central city and emerge stronger, says King. "We have an opportunity right now, but history tells us it won't last long." *h*