

# Reconfigure puzzle pieces

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The state appellate court last week affirmed what residents of Bay Beach Way have believed for quite some time: They are residents of Lavallette, not Toms River. Thursday's ruling, upholding a trial judge's decision in July 2008 to let the residents of that street secede from Toms River, ends six years of legal wrangling.

We're glad the 58 homeowners can say, without a side explanation, that they not only shop, dine, worship and pick up their mail in Lavallette, but now also officially live there. Toms River officials should have let them go last year, but instead appealed the ruling, citing concerns that it could cause a domino effect of other sections of towns looking to secede. But a few dominoes already fell -- residents of West Point Island and Vermont Shores successfully seceded in the 1960s and '70s, setting precedent for Bay Beach Way.

Instead of looking to hang onto distant sections of the township that have no border relationship to the mainland, Toms River and Ocean County officials should call for a re-evaluation of the peninsula communities to end the confusion of the puzzle pieces there now.

Heading southbound from the small boroughs of Mantoloking and Bay Head in the northern part of the Ocean County peninsula, the path wends through a number of communities identified by various names but "owned" by other towns -- South Mantoloking (Brick), Normandy Beach (parts are Brick and parts are Toms River), Chadwick Beach and Ocean Beach (both are part of Toms River). And some Ocean Beach residents have said they want to become part of Lavallette, too.

Next, after Lavallette, comes the Ortleigh Beach section of Toms River followed by the boroughs of Seaside Heights and Seaside Park. Just before the entrance to Island Beach State Park is South Seaside Park, which is governed by Berkeley.

It's a mass of identity confusion that makes little sense when it comes to municipal services. Why should South Seaside Park residents have to travel through two boroughs, head over a bridge, traverse a large township, then work their way through a few more boroughs to attend a meeting of their governing body?

Sen. Joseph Kyrillos, R-Monmouth, has a bill that would address the problem of the confusing peninsula communities by establishing a Municipal Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission, to reduce the number of municipal governments and make recommendations on which towns' services could best be streamlined. Cleaning up the puzzle here would be a good starting point.

Sen. Christopher Connors, R-Ocean, sits on the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee, where Kyrillos' bill sits. Connors should use that committee's next meeting as an opportunity to get Kyrillos' bill through before other communities start exploring the costly legal options successfully pursued by those in West Point Island, Vermont Shores and now, Bay Beach Way.