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Questions for Princeton Borough Council

1. The state is offering real incentives to municipalities to consolidate, including funds for studies and the offer to equalize taxes if necessary. Do you view these as sufficient incentives? What else can be done to facilitate the consolidation of the Borough and Township? (200 word limit)

Yes, I believe these incentives will help; however I am not certain that they are sufficient. In addition, the State should also put up funding to be used for “buy outs” – by this I mean to allow for the fairly negotiated early retirement of certain senior employees whose jobs will be duplicated (and therefore one of the two existing rendered unnecessary) in the larger combined municipality. For example senior police officers, public works managers and senior administration personnel could be more easily retired if one time cash incentives existed for their additional motivation. Unfortunately, these types of payments would make the “initial cost” of consolidation go up – but the benefits would accrue in subsequent years when these salaries are no longer an expense item in the budget of the larger, greater Princeton.

The Democratic elected representatives from both the Township and the Borough have taken great strides in 2009 toward improved comity and planning for a better Princeton. We have a long way to go; it will be hard work to envision an improved community. I will make it my goal on Council to listen to my constituents and take their ideas and aspirations and turn them into achievable successes.

2. Do you agree with some claims that the University is not paying its full share of the costs in the municipalities in which it owns property? How would you address this issue? (200 word limit)

Yes, I do. They are legally within their right not to pay their property taxes, but I believe their position not pay them is built on faulty moral terrain. The relief from paying taxes by non-profit institutions is a concept grounded in a time of limited governmental services and a common belief that the societal good that non-profits perform outweighs certain government needs. This is certainly a defensible concept, but not reflective of the current situation in Princeton.

Princeton University has grown into an enormous corporate enterprise, valued at 12 plus billion dollars, able to buy and sell any property it wants in our town. They have gone on a fifty year growth binge and they continue to plan to add an additional 1.5 million square feet of buildings in the next ten years. Our request is simple; please dear Tigers, pay your property taxes, just like the rest of us do, because we are all in the same boat together. Why should only half of the properties in the Borough have to shoulder 90% of the costs of running the Borough? It is not fair because it makes our town less affordable and diverse for existing and future residents.

3. Princeton University is proposing an “arts district” which will change the routing of some Borough streets and move the “dinky” station, among other things. What is your opinion of these moves and how would you work with the University to insure that the interests of Borough residents are protected? (200 word limit)

I applaud the University for their proposed “arts district” – it keys into the continued successes that McCarter Theater has brought to our region. As for the “transit” portion of their suggested neighborhood, I am less encouraged about its potential for success. I feel their plan proposes exchanging our present walkable dinky experience for a more suburban type train station with an overly complicated driving pattern that will not improve traffic congestion on Alexander Road. Outdated NJ Transit regulations force the dinky experience to be only a two stop shuttle service with two large parking lots at either end – the University is bound by their contract to sustain this failed model.

What we need is an improved mass transit system, closer to downtown (or uptown!) rather than farther away. We need reliability, additional stops, satellite parking lots for driving commuters from the north and west, vehicular fuel efficiency and fresh thinking about how we advance mass transit throughout the larger Princeton community. This would allow us to decouple Arts from Transit and give each a little air of their own to breathe. I will continue to propose specific plans to help advance the discussion of this critical issue for our community.