

To the editor

We recently attended a meeting of the Commission that is considering consolidation or additional shared services for Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. The Commission members are thoughtful and hard-working. Unfortunately, they are leaning toward a recommendation to consolidate. Consolidation will disenfranchise Borough residents and damage the Borough lifestyle, without saving taxpayers any significant amount of property taxes. Instead, the Commission should recommend shared services, which would produce some savings without adversely affecting Borough residents.

Most Princeton residents who favor consolidation believe that it will result in a substantial decrease in their property taxes. This is not true. Commission members themselves admit that the savings will be small. Since the municipal budget is only 1/4 of the property tax bill, any tax benefit will be negligible.

Consolidation would adversely affect the Borough because of the municipalities' different populations. The Township's population is several thousand larger than the Borough's. Moreover, half the Borough's population is university students, who rarely vote in local elections. As a result, in a consolidated Princeton, in local elections there would be two Township voters for every one Borough voter.

Most of Princeton Borough is a town—dense housing, walk to everything. Most of Princeton Township is a suburb—large lots, drive to everything. There are similarities and overlap, but the Borough and Township do have two distinct life styles. The municipalities' ordinances reflect this. The Borough's ordinances fit a town. The Township's ordinances fit a suburb.

The Borough and Township also differ on major decisions—for example, the location of the library. It is the jewel in the crown of the downtown.

But it was almost moved to the Princeton Shopping Center because of pressure from Township residents whose primary focus was easy parking and who didn't understand the importance of locating the library in a vibrant downtown.

Currently, Borough Council can uphold the Borough perspective in joint Borough-Township decisions. But if we consolidate, there will be one Princeton Council whose members will be elected at-large. Current Township Committee members will almost certainly be elected in preference to current Borough Council members because of the 2:1 voter ratio. As a result, changes in ordinances and major decisions will reflect only the Township perspective.

This would be tantamount to a takeover of the Borough by the Township, damaging the Borough life style. It would be a major loss to a consolidated Princeton, because the Borough perspective is what distinguishes Princeton from a New Jersey suburb.

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