

To the Editor:

Some of my fellow citizens have asked me to weigh in on the issue of consolidation. I have been on both sides of the issue over the years, 53 years living in the Township and 15 years now in the Borough.

The Borough is definitely different. The elected officials deal with many density issues of people living closer together at the center. The center, itself, is complicated by the large commercial district here, and the extensive interests of the largest employer in Mercer County: Princeton University. The Borough officials and administration have become experienced in dealing with those problems. The same cannot be said for the Township. If you vote to consolidate, it will take a while to get up to speed again with some loss of efficient services and an attentive voice in the affairs at the heart of Princeton.

Consolidation seems like a good idea theoretically, but, it doesn't always work that way in practice. The police forces have always told me that it would be difficult and not as efficient. Many firemen said the same thing. And, the schools, when they did consolidate to become Princeton Regional Schools, were at first dominated by the Borough school philosophy of how things should be done. Just ask a few of the Township teachers from back then. Some of them just plain quit.

It doesn't really matter, our fears of who is likely to dominate who. What's important is whether consolidation actually works better and saves us money by making us more efficient with less duplication of administrators. These days, my favorite example is the assessor's office. I'm sure that the town thought it would save money long ago by having one assessor for both municipalities. Fortunately they had a great assessor, Stuart Robson, and later Carol Caskey who did a great job for two more decades with lots of local real estate experience in her background. But, when the complicated job of doing two municipalities with an impending revaluation was given to Neal Snyder, our current assessor who last worked in Montgomery Twp. on cookie-cutter subdivisions, it became harder for an outsider without extensive local background to handle the job. His new assistant is also not from Princeton which does not ameliorate the situation.

The result in 2010 was a revaluation that was done incorrectly that cost all of us dearly and for many residents is even driving them out of town. The citizens lawsuit over this is about to be filed. Cutting costs up front for good experienced administration is not the solution. No savings of money even appear to be imminent.

The only benefit of consolidation that I see is one stop shopping for Princeton University. It's the coal mining company in the coal mining town. It makes their job easier of getting what they want. Perhaps two municipal assessors would have been better so that Princeton wouldn't be allowed to be on the honor system of assessing themselves. I ask, why have no other New Jersey Municipalities consolidated recently? Let's wait until it actually makes common sense.

James W. Firestone