

September 16, 2011

Dear Editor,

Consolidation of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township has been on the ballot in 1951, 1961, 1969, 1978, and 1996. Each time, Borough voters said "no." Why was this? On every occasion, Borough voters concluded that consolidation is not in their interest.

In this latest effort, the Joint Consolidation and Shared Services Commission once again failed to satisfy the concerns of Borough residents. The form of government that the Commission has selected will disenfranchise Borough residents, because there are two Township voters for every one Borough voter and all representatives will be elected at-large. The Commission gave reasons for their choice of form of government and dismissed other possible forms. There are valid reasons in favor of the form they propose, but those reasons are ultimately less important than the critical one that citizens will lose voting influence. Borough residents will have little or possibly no representation on a consolidated municipal government. Nor in the Planning Board, the Zoning Board, the School Board, the Recreation Board, and other municipal boards that currently have Borough representation. The Commission provided no compensating benefits of any kind to ameliorate these serious concerns for Borough residents.

Given the major disadvantage of consolidation--disenfranchisement--surely there must be a "killer app", an overwhelmingly important advantage, that could persuade Borough residents to support consolidation? People were anticipating that it would offer significant tax savings. Many residents have recently suffered astounding property tax increases of 10%, 30%, or even a crippling 50% in the recent property reassessment. The Commission's own data show that Consolidation may result in a 2.2% decrease in property taxes (even that may be optimistic; it depends on significant staff reductions). This is an absurdly small decrease, given our recent huge reassessment increases. It does not even begin to make the losses of representation worthwhile.

There is no "killer app" for Consolidation. Instead, it has a significant disbenefits.

There is a better alternative, providing most of the savings with none of the representation and other losses. It is to extend Shared Services without consolidation, an approach also proposed by the President of the NJ Conference of Mayors. We already share schools, recreation, a number of commissions, and our library. The majority of the savings proposed by the Commission, in fact, arise not from consolidation at all, but from further sharing, notably of the Police departments. Public Works is another major area to examine for sharing. We can get these savings by Sharing without the disadvantages of Consolidation.

The Borough and Township form a close community. But we need not and should not get married. Better, we can remain good friends, combine selected resources, and retain our individual strengths.

Sincerely,

Anthony Lunn
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