

To Keep Princeton “Livable,” Vote “Yes” for Jobs, “Yes” for Cooperation, and “No” on Consolidation.

To the Editor:

The decision on consolidation for me boils down to two questions. Both questions are raised by the relatively minimal tax savings from staff cuts and a hoped-for elimination of redundancies projected by our Consolidation Commission.

The first question is: Presented with a choice between saving \$1 a day (not counting weekends and holidays) and depriving 17 of my neighbors and fellow citizens of good, secure jobs, which do I choose?

For me it is a no-brainer: I choose to save their jobs rather than my \$1, which won't even buy a cup of coffee at Small World.

The second question is: What is all this about, really? Who gains and who loses from consolidation overall?

The promised savings are not only relatively minimal; they are also not guaranteed — even if we fire 17 people, sell Borough Hall and close the Suzanne Patterson Center. And there are many expenses not included in the Commission's projections, which leave me convinced by those who say that costs seem as likely to go up as down.

Moreover, the two entities have already shown that they know how to work together (13 joint agencies and all that). If we can cooperate without consolidating, why consolidate? Why not just continue to do what we have been doing, only do it better?

The answer may be that the clear winners under consolidation are the larger (and consolidating!) institutions in town, like Princeton University, which no doubt finds it exasperating (and more expensive) to deal with two heads rather than one.

A consolidated Princeton will surely enable them to implement any growth plans more easily and cheaply than the current structure. This is elementary rational choice economics. The expected opportunity cost to Borough residents of changes to the downtown is greater than it is to residents of the town as a whole. Eliminate the Borough's separate voice and the expected costs go down. Guaranteed.

For me, then, consolidation is about making it easier to develop the downtown. I support development of the downtown. But I also support making sure that all those affected by such development have a say in the conditions that affect them that is proportionate to their stake in the outcome.

Therefore I do not support consolidation.

By the way, my decision has nothing to do with presumed cultural or lifestyle differences between Borough and Township. Where I come from (Idaho), and from the perspective of those with whom I now work (New York City construction apprentices and teacher's aides), all Princetonians are pretty much the same — and lucky to live in such a fine community. If there is a difference, it boils down to the old real estate adage and nothing more: location, location, location.

I urge our elected officials to continue to work together to find ways in which the two municipalities can cooperate to preserve Princeton as the livable, lovable town it is. And I encourage all residents to vote yes for jobs, yes for cooperation, and “No” on consolidation.

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