

November 4, 2011

Friends:

In just a few days, voters in Princeton Borough and Princeton Township will decide whether or not we shed our common border and become a single municipality. As a Borough voter, I'll be voting too, and to make a long story short, I'll be voting "No."

I was a Borough Council member when this latest consolidation effort got underway, and although I voted to support the consolidation study, I was a vocal "skeptic" of consolidation. I felt then that the issue of consolidation is highly emotionally charged and deeply controversial, and whenever it's under consideration it distracts us from other pressing issues. I felt that many of the taxpayer savings promised by consolidation could just as well be achieved through other means, such as through increased shared services between the Borough and Township (or with the county or with any number of other nearby municipalities for that matter). I feared that no useful discussion of these options would take place as long as the "Big C" was on the table. My fears, I think, proved correct.

A lot of folks have questioned the projected cost savings of consolidation as presented by the Consolidation Study Commission. I consider a number of the members of the commission to be my friends, and I think they did their level best to arrive at reasonable estimates. But their cost savings rest on one basic assumption: that some as yet unknown body of elected officials, the Mayor and Council of (united) Princeton, would follow their tough, cost-cutting recommendations *to the letter*. To me, that's a pretty shaky assumption.

The focus on cost-cutting, to me, distracts from a much more basic question: *why consolidate now?* Is something terribly wrong with our two towns that only a consolidation can remedy? I don't think so. Both towns are fiscally healthy and perfectly capable of reducing municipal budgets without consolidation. Speaking for my hometown, the Borough, we have safe neighborhoods, access to mass transportation, and a vibrant, walkable downtown. The Borough didn't arrive at this place by chance, but through the many years of solving our problems as a community, a community that was in control of its own municipal destiny. The Borough *works*, just as the Township *works*, and I think the old adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" applies here. To me, consolidation is a solution to a problem that doesn't really exist.

Finally, Princeton Borough is my home and it's just the right size for me. I'm not ready to "trade up" to a bigger place just yet!

Andrew Koontz