

I am grateful to TUF for the opportunity to explain my candidacy at some length, greater than usual for broadly distributed campaign fliers. Phil Kramer assures me that TUF readers will read such a statement.

My most important reason for running for election to the Franklin Township Council is that 'big picture' issues, in particular the budget, are not getting the scrutiny they deserve and need. My predecessor in the First Ward seat is very good on constituent issues, but from my observations of Council meetings over the past year is not able to contribute much to 'big picture' discussions.

The foremost 'big picture' issue is always taxes and the budget. This year, because of a sharp rise in assessments of businesses, which had been undervalued by the longtime prior assessor, property taxes have actually decreased on most residences; but to be truthful this cannot be expected to recur (though at least any future increases will start from a lower level). The Council must examine the budget very carefully, "question every expense" as we put it, to keep municipal expenses down, particularly since some expenses such as health insurance cannot be kept from increasing (this can only be addressed at the national level). Also, the salary contract with the police force, one of our biggest municipal expenses, is subject to binding arbitration, which has tended to result in continuing increases. In addition, over the next year the Council will study the Matrix operational audit, to implement as many recommendations as possible while still maintaining township services.

The Council however can cut expenses only for the municipal budget, which takes only 16% of residents' tax dollars; the schools and Somerset County account for most of the rest. But increasing the commercial assessments relative to residential, as happened this year, decreases or limits what residents pay for *all* these taxes. To continue this trend will require bring more businesses to town, to keep increasing commercial assessments and the share of taxes paid by them.

This need not entail much more construction or rezoning more land for business. The M-1 and C-B zones in the northwestern part of town have many vacant commercial buildings, which pay lower taxes when they are not bringing revenue to their owners. We need to attract business, as the economy recovers, to occupy these vacant buildings. I would like the township to have a professional Economic Development Officer to work full-time on attracting business. However, under present budget conditions we cannot afford to hire a high-level professional to do this; we will have to work with some combination of consultants and further training of our present Economic Development Officer, who works under the direction of the Assistant Manager, who herself has many responsibilities. My running mate Roz Sherman will take the lead in improving this situation.

A second major reason for running for Council concerns the relationship between the Council and the Planning Board. During my nearly forty years of involvement with township government I have been principally involved with land use: eight years on the Board of Zoning Adjustment (1972-6, 1981-5) and, by the end of this year, fourteen years on the Planning Board (1996-to date, the last six years as chair). During much of those 14 years I have seen the Council change zoning either without waiting for Planning Board advice, or actively overriding the Planning Board (which it can do with a two-thirds majority).

The worst example of this was the Jack Morris proposal for 800 apartments, scaled down to 642, between Bennetts Lane and Veronica Avenue, which the Council forced the Planning

Board to accept as part of our 2005-6 Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) plan. (COAH required the township to submit a single plan, accepted by both Planning Board and Council, or face noncompliance and ‘builders’ remedy’ lawsuits which could have introduced massive developments anywhere in the town.) The Council developed a list of projects for the COAH plan in secret, at the direction of the then municipal chair and Councilwoman (former Director of Planning) Ellen Ritchie. But this led to the overthrow of that chair in the 2006 primary election of municipal committeepeople, and ultimately to the recall of Ellen Ritchie as councilwoman, an effort led by my running mate Phil Kramer and joined in by those who are running as Democrats this year. I joined in this effort, and as the makeup of the Council changed I, as chair of the Planning Board, directed the Planning Board in removing the Morris project from our COAH plan. (Some may comment that at a December 2005 meeting of the Planning Board I cast a vote in favor of the Morris plan. The chairman always votes last, and by the time I voted there was already a majority against it, so that my vote meant nothing. I voted as I did to keep relations with Ellen Ritchie, which ultimately resulted in being able to keep Mike Orsini on the Planning Board in January 2006.)

Lawsuits against the 2005 COAH statewide process resulted in our having to prepare a new COAH plan in 2008. I am proud to state that this process was carried out by the Planning Board, completely in open public sessions. We were able to satisfy our COAH obligation without approving *any* truly new projects. The necessary COAH units, beyond those already approved in the Berry St and Franklin Commons projects and expected from the Leewood and Pennrose developments and various minor plans, will be provided in the already approved Summerfields and Ladurée projects and senior apartments replacing the Shady Rest nursing home on Hamilton St. The Summerfields and Ladurée projects had been approved years ago as mainly senior communities (which would pay property taxes without producing schoolchildren). Unfortunately, the State Legislature passed a law allowing builders with unbuilt projects approved as senior communities to convert them to general availability, i.e. accepting families. However, the Planning Board has been able to keep some senior units in both these projects as well as meeting our obligation for affordable and in particular very low income units (13% of total affordable units, required by another state law).

Our intent, which has in the main been successful, was to approve affordable housing units without also having to approve four times their number in market-rate family-accepting units, with severe effects on the school system and school taxes. The now-built Berry St. project, the Franklin Commons project now being built on Franklin Boulevard (which will have shops at street level), the Pennrose proposal, all 100% affordable, and the Leewood project (50% affordable) are examples.

As Councilman, I want to keep planning at the Planning Board, and as Council representative on the Planning Board I will keep the Council informed of the intentions of Planning Board actions, so that changes which must be approved by the Council can be passed expeditiously. Too often ordinances proposed by the Planning Board have ‘fallen through the cracks’ or been held up for long periods by the Council. But also, I will try to restrain the Council, if necessary, from ill-considered actions which would have negative long-range effects.

I should add that as chair of the Planning Board I have felt an obligation to explain to the public *why* we were doing what we did – sometimes due to constraints of state law. I intend to maintain this role on the Council.

A third major reason for running is more First Ward-specific. I have served on an *ad hoc* committee on recreation for the southern part of the township, which is about to make its final report to the Council. Franklin has less active recreation facilities (playing fields, etc.) than many towns its size, although we have a great deal of protected open space (one-third of the township, largely due to the state-owned Six Mile Run reserve). Existing fields are over-used, and as a result the grass is unable to recover from heavy traffic. Following a survey of residents, the committee will recommend development of playing fields on the Catalpa property, at Old Vliet Lane and South Middlebush Rd. This property was purchased by the township some years ago with the intent of developing active recreation there (although much of the land, including its mature woods and the sloping field at the rear, will remain undeveloped). Although building fields in Middlebush Park just north of the municipal building is first in line, I would like to see development of playing fields, specifically a cricket field and two soccer fields, on the Catalpa property within my four year term.

Our Open Space protection ordinance, approved by township referendum, allows funds raised through the open space tax to be used for development of active recreation, so that this expense need not come out of the general township budget. The open space tax raises funds in excess of its obligations for bond payments, maintenance, and the contract with our open space consultant (who does all the work of negotiating for open space and farmland preservation and directs maintenance). This excess may be directed towards development of active recreation while continuing to acquire open space through bond funds and accumulated funds. We have preserved, as township-owned open space or as preserved farmland, some 1260 acres over the past nine years, and fewer properties remain to be preserved (although still some major ones). The township is not the only preserving agency; the state of New Jersey also preserves land directly (if the bond issue on this November's ballot passes) and pays 60% of the cost of our preservation of farmland, while the county pays 20%, leaving the township to pay only 20%. We should be able eventually to preserve almost all remaining open space in the First Ward, the only exception being remaining properties in the Cluster Residential Zone along Rte. 27, which would be very expensive.

Beyond this, I pledge to maintain constituent service, relaying questions to the township manager to find out what is being done, or why it isn't being done.

Theodore Chase, Jr.