

## Candidate Questionnaire Responses

### **Princeton Borough Council - one-year unexpired term**

The League of Women Voters of the Princeton Area is publishing the verbatim responses of candidates to questions asked by the League. Responses were limited to 150 words and truncated after the 150<sup>th</sup> word.

#### Dudley G. Sippelle, Republican

Career Senior Foreign Service Officer, US State Dept., winning official recognition for political and economic analysis and innovation in refugee and immigration management; public school teacher and coach, university professor, volunteer fireman, school board member and P-TO president, current member of Princeton Sewer Operating Committee volunteer English literacy tutor.

#### Kevin Wilkes, Democrat

Born – Atlanta, Ga. 1957

Degrees: Trinity School NYC, (Dipl.); Princeton (A.B.); Yale, (Master of Architecture)

Profession: Architect – Wilkes Architects & Princeton Design Guild

Achievements: Faculty, NJIT; Building Inspector, Princeton Township; Council of Princeton Future

Princeton Public Projects: Writers Block, Quark Park, Battle Monument Lighting, Vintner Statue

**Given that Princeton Borough and Township have established more than a dozen joint commissions or boards to manage municipal matters and have therefore implicitly agreed to cooperate, what would you do to repair the acrimonious relationship that has permeated Borough-Township dialogues in recent years?**

Mr. Sippelle:

My experience as a member of the Princeton Sewer Operating Committee illustrates that combined agencies make sense operationally and financially. Recent problems arise from divided responsibility for accounting. This raises the question of why the accounting/finance function is not combined. Owing to slipshod performance in Borough billing procedure, the Borough comes out on the short end of the financial stick with Borough taxpayers, in effect, subsidizing the Township. Mutual recrimination has hardened attitudes on both sides which further wastes time and money. I would get off the soap box and reach out to members of the Township Committee receptive to cost savings with examples of how further combination of services would benefit taxpayers in both municipalities—starting with the Finance Departments. The Princeton Regional Health Dept. reports that by reducing redundancy, its combined operation saves taxpayers \$200,000 annually. That's an argument for consolidated services that should appeal to everyone.

Mr. Wilkes:

I dispute the assertion that an “acrimonious relationship has permeated Borough-Township dialogues”. It is more accurate to say that our working relationship has flourished in many areas and become strained in others. In the areas where our mutual interests have aligned, we need to continue the good work. Issues such as truck traffic along State Highways 206 and 27, improvement of parks and recreational facilities, planning and administration of existing joint agencies have all benefited from collaboration between the two governing bodies. Other areas, such as the resolution of library parking and billing for joint capital accounts, have become mired in contentious debate. But both sides are seeking to resolve these disagreements and to put into place new protocols to prevent this from happening in the future. I believe there is significant good will between the two governing bodies and I see improvements as the trend for the future.

**There is still duplication of services because several major municipal functions, notably police protection, are still separate. Given that this is costly to taxpayers, how would you address this problem?**

Mr. Sipprelle:

The Borough Police Dept. is a glaring example of how to waste taxpayer money. There are really two issues: 1) Why are two distinct police forces required in Princeton? and 2) Why does the Council exhibit such timidity in questioning the department’s bloated budget? The first is never convincingly answered and the second is an abdication of fiduciary responsibility. Three suspended police officers are on full pay and benefits. The cost to taxpayers is enormous. Public safety has not suffered. These positions should be eliminated. Council approves purchase of new police vehicles every year and declares relatively new vehicles surplus. The replacement schedule should be stretched out. I would review any already existing consultants’ reports to implement cost-saving recommendations and organize with the Township a time-limited citizens’ advisory group to solicit public opinion and make recommendations for consolidating at least some functions such as dispatch and motor pool immediately.

Mr. Wilkes:

This question assumes that this duplication of services is a redundancy – but that is not the case. The Borough Police do a good job of policing the Borough and the Township Police do a good job of policing the Township. We can’t simply erase one department and double the population protected by the remaining department. We need to offer a consistent high level of policing for all residents. Police dispatch is an area where a modest duplication of personnel does exist and a joint dispatch program would make economic sense for both communities. More than likely, merging the entire police departments would not lead to great financial savings, although it might lead to management and staffing improvements. Other departments do offer a duplication of services and they are ripe for joint inter-local agreements. I propose within three years,

merging the construction departments and within six years merging the public works departments.

**Consolidation last came up for a vote eight years ago and was approved by Township voters but rejected by Borough residents. Would you work to raise the issue again?**

**If so, what steps would you take to reopen this question?**

Mr. Sipprelle:

Consolidation has been long debated, but times have changed and it should be given serious consideration again and soon. Owing to escalating property taxes and the high cost to the taxpayer of Borough government, it is perhaps time to jettison this structural albatross. We should await recommendations of the consolidation commission, but be prepared to move ahead expeditiously. I would provide leadership in the debate, holding open meetings to gauge voter sentiment first-hand. Opposition seems to come mostly from self-serving politicians wishing to preserve fiefdoms. Talk of “downtown” receiving short shrift from the Township is specious. Spending time in Borough center, one finds, outside of PU students and tourists, more Township residents than those from the Borough. In any event, we must not allow the issue to be talked to death. After a decent interval of debate and voter education, I would move to a referendum.

Mr. Wilkes:

I will always support the concept that the Borough and Township should work effectively together. If creating one municipality solves that challenge, then I would support that. But the odds for consolidation are long and existing boundaries are embedded deeply. I worry that placing our collective efforts into consolidation will act as a substitute for doing the challenging but obtainable work of improving the administration and abilities of our remaining individual departments. We should focus on immediate successes: improved administration of existing joint agency accounts, creating more inter-local service agreements and joint agencies, merging police departments and consolidating firehouse locations at Witherspoon and Valley Road. When the discussions do come around to consolidation, I will participate fully and with an open mind. But I won't wait for that to happen to commence improvements in our policies and government - those can start today.

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