

Even if you agree with the board's plan to raise taxes 50% over the next few years to cover the cost of two extremely expensive schools, there are potential risks. Although you may believe these are remote or impossible, there are serious risks to the levels of borrowing that this school board is having us take on. The Board has no professional finance managers and has not taken on a tax revenue study to test the potential tax capacity of the community. Rather, they are looking at our taxes versus those of the surrounding communities and concluding that our taxes are lower than Radnor and T/E, so why not raise them.

But consider why are taxes are low. We have a large commercial tax base that borders City Line Avenue. These businesses were lured here because we offered a substantially better deal than the City of Philadelphia, without the effect of a change in location for their employees and customers. But our taxes are not as low as they were and we now rely heavily on that commercial tax base. So what would happen if those large commercial entities found that the tax deal in the City is looking better? Could the residential tax base pick up the slack? Ask the school board the answer they came to when they studied that question.

It is true that Lower Merion Township has maintained a AAA bond rating from Moodys. This is also something we have come to rely on. But the high fiscal ratings of the township have nothing to do with this school board. This reputation was built by prudent managers who never borrowed near the levels already incurred by this board. And they have far to go to meet their planned expenditures.

So while you may be comfortable with the board's current course of action, why go it alone. Why not give the community the chance to agree? That way, if those who are concerned turn out to be right, at least you can say the community decided together. Consider the risks.

- What if the community becomes aware that we are over-building Harriton and at a cost that is twice that spent per student in other prominent districts and then refuses to approve the tax increase necessary to cover the second high school (the new Act 1 will likely provide for a vote in 2008)?
- What if your elderly neighbor can't pay her taxes and has to move?
- What if the 2012 tax increase to cover the shortfall in funding for the teacher's pension system is as large as the district currently suggests?
- What if the business community that came across City Line Avenue for the tax advantage is lured back to the City because we can no longer compete and, as a result of this massive revenue loss, Moody's pulls our AAA bond rating?

- What if the district does severely cut education programs because enough money to cover the bad judgment of the current board simply doesn't exist (even in Lower Merion)?

Surely, if any of these came to pass, you would want the piece of mind of knowing that the community had a say. So gather your friends and neighbors, come to the Act 34 hearing on September 21st and demand a referendum vote. This is our last chance!