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Mr. Brian Long
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Hello Brian,

I have received your letter of request regarding Columbia Borough issue in the upcoming election. Below are my responses to your questions.

(1) What do you see as Columbia's three most significant obstacles to economic growth in the next three years?

First, lack of a firm stance concerning the number of apartments in our town. Studies have shown that areas with the level of apartments at greater than 25% of the residences are at risk; Columbia's is approaching 50%. I am not against apartment, condos, and the like, but there has to be a more proportionate balance between the two to establish a healthy environment for growth. Second, the amount of homes being purchased by large out of town corporations which are converting these (some were single family dwellings) into multi-unit apartments and then seeking tax reassessments on these properties. This action goes completely against what the borough is trying to accomplish through LERTA and other programs to encourage development of properties which have been "let go" over the years and hopefully conversion of multi-unit dwellings back into single occupant dwellings. Third, properties which were purchased over the past few years and which have yet to see planned/proposed development due to financial or other issues. It does not help our situation when we see holes in the ground and other undeveloped properties in the downtown area sitting vacant or underutilized.

(2) What qualities, characteristics and/or expertise make you ultimately most qualified for the position of borough councilor?

Councilors need to take active involvement in chairing their committees, and in researching issue and possible solutions to issues as they arise in our town and ultimately voted on and acted upon by council. The internet and Borough's Association meetings are great sources of information as to how other communities have handled similar issues – it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel every time a problem arises, as others may have already been presented with similar problems. I also feel that candidates should have a history of regularly attending borough meetings to familiarize themselves with current issues and with the legislative process, and am concerned that many of the new candidates have not taken the time to do so.

(3) Columbia's taxes rank near the top of all boroughs in the county; what will you do to help moderate the property tax burden for Columbia's citizens?

Having served that last 4 years on Columbia Borough Council and as Chair of the Finance committee, my fellow Councilors and I have been fortunate enough in hard economic times to hold the line on taxes as witnessed by only a 0.25 mil tax raise the last 4 years, despite lower than anticipated tax revenues from borough citizens. This has been accomplished through diligent oversight and justification of all spending and a constant effort at looking at new methods/alternatives for costs savings, starting with the Borough Manager, Borough Finance Supervisor, and down through each department head.

Initiatives include bulk purchasing for common materials between departments, memberships in energy consortiums, and taking advantages of new competitive rates for natural gas and electric supplier usage. These types of initiatives and creative thinking must be maintained as part of standard practice in the future to allow savings wherever possible, which is crucial to holding the line on taxes, especially in a borough the size of Columbia.

(4) What are your thoughts on the borough's downtown revitalization efforts? How much do you think the borough should spend annually on this project?

I feel that the borough has made a constant, concerted effort both legislatively and to present opportunities for development of the downtown. I also feel that our local real estate brokers need to better assist in bringing in new developers and pairing them with the appropriate property/opportunity. While I am sure that many residents are upset with the slower than expected pace of some revitalization projects, such as the new trees and lighting on Locust Street, progress being made is sometimes slowed by matters that are out of our control. Believe me, this is a source of frustration for Columbia's Councilors as well.

(5) Many believe that walking police patrols benefit communities; would you consider supporting walking police patrols in the Borough?

Increased walking and/or bike patrols are a necessity to our policing efforts as we need to present a real, face-to-face presence with our residents to let them know that we are there for them and to reinforce to those who would break our laws that we are present and keeping a constant vigil on them. This is the main idea behind National Night Out and other programs - an effort by local enforcement authorities and our residents that shows we are here, we are watching out for those who would break our laws, and that we will not tolerate unlawful behavior in Columbia.

Sincerely,

Kelly Murphy

Current member and candidate for re-election, Columbia Borough Council