

POSITION PAPER
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**An Open Letter to the Concerned Pilesgrove Residents
And Today's Sunbeam**

Let's do some quick math.

Schools and landfill costs are two major impacts on local budgets.

According to the Tax Assessor, a homeowner in Pilesgrove Township pays an average of \$3,900 in property taxes, with the average house assessed at \$146,000. The NJ Department of Education, in its annual report card, says Pilesgrove Township spends \$8,533 to educate each student. The report card also says your school relies on your property taxes for 36% of its revenue.

Using those numbers, if the homeowner has two children, it costs \$17,066 to educate them. Even if EVERY PENNY of that homeowner's \$3,900 tax bill went to the school district, it would not be enough to cover 36% of the bill, which is \$6,143. Every other homeowner and business in Pilesgrove Township has to share that school tax burden. If 100 new houses with 200 new kids go up where a farm used to be – well, you do the math. And don't forget the cost of a new school.

And that farm? Yes, farmland assessment is minimal on the land – which is the best preservation tool we have – but that farm family is paying the same tax rate as you do on their family home. Plus, that farm family pays the township \$6,000 to \$9,000 a year in taxes on all those farm buildings.

Remember, cows don't go to school.

As for landfill tipping fees, it cost Pilesgrove and other municipalities \$51 a ton to take trash there. The Salem County Utilities Authority says each Salem County person generates an average of 5 pounds of trash per day. That's 5 pounds x 365 days for 1825 pounds of trash for one person, or 7,300 pounds a year for a family of four – 3.6 tons x \$51 per ton. It costs the township \$186.15 a year to pick up trash each year from that household. Take those same 100 new houses with an average of four people per household – that's another 365 tons of trash in Pilesgrove and an extra \$18,615 in tipping fees, and higher costs just to get the trash to the landfill.

When one community is hit with the prospect of 300 to 700 houses that would forever change its skyline, landscape, and economics, it is frightening. The residential developments proposed for Pilesgrove Township give all of Salem County a reason to

pause and think. We never envisioned that Salem County would look like Washington Township or South Harrison Township in Gloucester County.

We understand the issues that have mobilized the Concerned Pilesgrove Residents to join together in a common cause, and we also recognize the professional manner in which CPR members have conducted themselves in making their positions known at township meetings. The CPR grass roots struggle will have an impact far beyond the Pilesgrove Township boundaries. Each of us needs to be concerned.

It would be unfortunate if 379 new homes were built on Kings Highway, where the County has already permanently preserved more than 1,500 acres of farmland. This type of residential housing development is counterproductive to the investment the County and municipality has made to preserve open space in this section of Pilesgrove Township. The proposed development of 700 homes on County House Road creates the same issue in our Mannington project area where more than 3000 acres are preserved. You can also expect a bevy of nuisance suits from future homeowners on County House Road when the existing practice of spreading chicken manure takes place. As for the proposal to build 200 homes in Auburn – that would nearly double the people in that community.

It is also incongruous to allow hundreds of wells and septic systems to be built over a critical aquifer. This is the same aquifer that is depleted as a result of our current drought and the drain from as far north as Camden County's over-development. If our farmers in this critical aquifer are refused well permits to irrigate their crops, why would the state even think twice about authorizing the antiquated sewer plant at Richman's Restaurant to be upgraded to serve all the new homes.

Balanced growth and smart growth are not just words of rhetoric for a campaign. The Republicans have spearheaded balanced growth efforts and we have a record of achievement that you can examine.

As Freeholders, Dave Sparks and Mike Facemyer took the initiative several years ago to bring municipalities together for a Saturday morning meeting so local officials could learn techniques of conservation planning from nationally recognized planner Randall Arendt of the Natural Lands Trust. We have encouraged our municipalities to adhere to balanced, smart growth. We urge municipalities to incorporate into their ordinances strong right to farm language and to require that language on every new survey and deed transfer, as Upper Pittsgrove does. We are now asking municipalities to take a close look at their COAH (affordable housing) compliance and master plans, and we have asked our County Planner to be a presenter at your upcoming seminar and to provide any assistance he can.

Linda DuBois, as former mayor and now committee member in Pittsgrove Township, faces many of the same issues you are now facing in Pilesgrove Township. Linda is particularly sensitive to suburban sprawl, as she and her family farm 4,000 acres of vegetables and grain. Linda recently brought state and local people to the table and

worked out an agreement that stopped a development of several hundred new homes in Pittsgrove Township, convincing the landowner to see his equity through farmland preservation. Pittsgrove Township has learned that investing in farmland preservation is far more profitable than building yet another new school.

It is important to debunk the myth that housing is a win-win ratable. For every property tax dollar paid by a farm owner, 33 cents is used for local services. For every property tax dollar paid by a homeowner, \$1.12 is required for direct services. Somebody has to pay the bill. Large scale housing also brings people into the County who don't necessarily want to live in the country – they just don't want to live in the City or a cramped suburb. But you'll find they still want the services, and soon your township will be looking at the cost for full-time paid police and fire and building new schools.

It is also important to understand that senior housing is not the panacea. Just look to Ocean County, once the fastest growing county in the nation due to its retirement housing. Ocean County became an attractive location for over-55, restricted housing communities. It seemed a perfect plan: no children, no school tax burden. But thousands and thousands of new people wanted services and shopping conveniences – and people moved into Ocean County to fill the jobs at stores, pharmacies, and restaurants.

We cannot shut our doors around Salem County and say no more residential housing. Not one of us can be “the last person in.” However, we must carefully review township ordinances to ensure that conservation planning is required, and that development takes place where it can best be accommodated and at a pace we can accept.

Dave Sparks, Freeholder Director
Mike Facemyer, Freeholder
Linda DuBois, Freeholder Candidate.