

August 3, 2017

Dear Northfield Township Board (and Citizens/Listeners),

As a property owner in our beautiful township I appreciate the opportunity to be heard on a few concerns that I have. My apologies for not being able to attend in-person.

As with many others, I love so many things about our township. We have a small town feel yet we are close to the amenities of Ann Arbor, Brighton, and other surrounding towns. Our lakes are works of art and our wildlife is incomparable. My concern however, is that in the last 30 years, I've witnessed a DEEPLY unsettling dynamic: property taxes rise radically while our small business ownership has severely decreased. This is the first time in my life that I've seen us without enough businesses to even sustain the Northfield Township Area Chamber of Commerce (and from my understanding we do not derive much if any financial benefit from those who choose to be a part of the Brighton Chamber). The mom-and-pop shops that used to *line* our Main Street have basically disappeared, and vacant building abound from Main to Barker and beyond. I know that I am probably preaching to the choir on this subject, but still as a tax paying citizen I feel compelled to share how troubled I am by these dynamics. I am aware that special committees have been tasked with addressing this issue, but from a citizen's perspective it feels as if township committees abound and progress does not. We appear to be so tied-up with our bylaws and plans that we lose sight of what's basically common sense.

I recently gained some insight into why so many of our shops may be vacant. There is a business owner who has been trying to rent a building on Barker Rd who has been hustled for one fee after another (now totaling thousands of dollars) before she's even being allowed to open her shop. She's told she needs to appear before the planning commission time and again, yet she has been pushed off their schedule and even had meetings canceled without proper notice. This situation has continued for months now, and it sadly appears this intelligent entrepreneur could be bankrupt before this township will even let her open her doors! We MUST ask ourselves, are we this adamant that vacant buildings are MORE beneficial to property owners than cute shops run by intelligent business owners? WHY are we fighting small business owners so violently? It's certainly not beneficial for people like me, who are desperately trying to see the fruits of their property taxes in this area. I don't think the average citizen is even aware of this problem; unless someone has tried to open a small business themselves we are typically unaware of these terrible obstacles. My fear is that the township board may see this as the planning commission's problem, and that at times the planning commission may defer blame unto other committees...but we need to *examine* AND *address* this with a comprehensive all-hand-on-deck attitude.

Our citizens have historically been divided on the issue of massive development endeavors. But let's be honest, that's not what we're talking about here. Most of us can agree that small business ownership and mom-and-pop shops in buildings that ALREADY exist are beneficial for ALL of us. We're not talking about adding thousands of homes, we're talking about allowing people to contribute to our tax base and bring-in commerce at a time we desperately need it. I've witnessed and volunteered at countless political events when people are trying to get voted INTO office here; there's a lot of talk about change. But somehow that passion either dissipates after the election or the vast obstacles in-place thwart even the most passionate and altruistic of individual agendas. Either way, taxpayers like myself are desperately in need of a revitalization, we need to see the fruits of our labors...especially when many of us are paying property tax that's almost half of our home mortgage EACH month.

I am not complaining when I say this, merely pointing out a black-and-white reality: when you view our property taxes compared to those of other areas throughout our entire state (which can easily be done online), it is plainly apparent that ours are some of the absolute highest in the state. Therefore, one would *assume* that our township services and amenities trump others and are extremely well-funded. Yet instead, we have township services and schools who routinely seem to have *fewer* funds than they need. Talk to a police officer on the

street or a teacher and see what they have to say about this, because from my experience they sure don't seem to feel like they reap the benefits of our high property taxes. Perhaps the excessive obstacles we make small-business owners jump through may be a piece of this puzzle. Equally, it doesn't take a forensic accountant to understand that vacant buildings do not help us financially, especially if you consider the cyclical nature of commerce and the importance of having something to draw visitors to our community with.

While I know there are systems of checks-and-balances in-place and auditing takes place to an extent, I feel compelled to share that there is growing talk throughout town of a massive endeavor to basically force the township into an objective, detailed third-party audit...simply because our property taxes do not line-up with the seemingly persistent lack of funds from one township entity to another. People feel there may be misappropriation of funds at-play because these things just don't add-up. From what I've heard, people aren't even assuming it's deliberate, they just seem to believe there's unintelligent handling of funds. These are not my words, I am simply trying to convey what I've heard in the hopes that the township can make some distinguished changes before it comes to something like this. There are professional consultants who specialize in this type of thing; I beg you, do whatever it takes to really get a grip on this situation. I imagine there are even professionals who would volunteer their time at no charge (thinking outside the box, perhaps a master's or doctoral student specializing in accounting or finance who needs to work on a big project). There are probably finance professors who would be equally intrigued by such an opportunity (even pro bono), because it could be added to their curriculum vitae. Perhaps there are similar towns in other states who have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps who could mentor us. We need to look for professionals, volunteers, or even just guides who can help facilitate progress...because to be honest, it's *not* being done from within. We need to get creative here, because the success and the pride of our people are in one of the most vulnerable positions to date.

In closing, I know that serving on these committees is not an easy task. I grew-up sitting at township meetings and watching the behind-the-scenes efforts that take place. I also know it can be extremely thankless to be involved in township work, so PLEASE do not take my concern as criticism of your *personal* efforts. My concern is simply concern, and I am at a loss for whom to share it with. Taxpayers need to be represented, and I suppose I'm hoping that someone in a position of authority who has been voted into office can really make waves here...we are counting on you! Surely some of you are thinking "If you have this much opinion, you should just run for office and try to evoke change yourself.", but the problem is that many of us have obstacles which prevent us from being able to sit on these committees, which is why we simply do our best to educate ourselves on the candidates available and vote as responsibly as we can for those *whom we hope* may be able to give us (and our hard-earned money) a voice. Ann Kirkpatrick once said, "When millions of Americans are tightening their belts, folks have the right to expect their elected officials to do the same." As such, those of us who have not the time nor the ability to hold office rely heavily on your ability to see and respond to our needs. We are, for lack of a better term, at your mercy and in need of some help.

Thank you for your time. Northfield Township Resident, Dr. Amy Scholl