

In promoting our platform of open, limited government, fiscal responsibility and experienced management, the Hammonton Democrats feel that it is necessary to discuss fiscal responsibility. With a federal budget deficit and a draconian state budget, the Hammonton Democrats would like to share their views on the measures necessary to maintain the fiscal health of Hammonton.

It is always difficult for politicians to take tough stands when money is involved. Often, elections are won by promising the people what they want and wishing away the problems involved in fulfilling those promises. There are those out there who think shopping locally, a few coats of paint and taking credit for decades-old grants is the key to fiscal health. The Hammonton Democrats will not engage in this political grandstanding.

The Hammonton Democrats hope to implement the following reforms:

- Focus on the essential town services of police, fire and highway departments. Ironically, our current administration and their supporters who decried consolidation are now considering turning over the police department to the State Police.
- The sewer department should be able to maintain its own surplus for future infrastructure improvements.
- The Town must evaluate non-essential and back-office functions and determine if integrating those services with neighboring communities could cut costs.
- Determine the actual cost for the Town Hall to include parking and demolition. Currently, there are conflicting estimates on the project. In the January 23, 2008 edition of the *Hammonton Gazette*, the head of the Town Hall building committee reported that less than \$20,000 had been spent on change orders. Yet based off of the minutes from the Nov. 19, 2007, Dec. 17, 2007 and the Jan. 21, 2008 Town Council meetings, a total of \$31,804.53 worth of change orders had been approved. (At the February 25 Council Meeting, an additional \$29,650.69 was approved.)
- Transfer responsibility of all “Cosmetic” improvement initiatives such as Little Italy and the Historical Preservation effort to the private sector. The Little Italy coordinator position will cost the town \$23,000 a year. Salary and benefits are \$43,000 and the grant only covers \$20,000. The historical preservation effort has expanded from Bellevue and Central and will now cost \$21,545.
- Set aside tax revenue for debt reduction which as of 2007 is \$300,000 higher than in 2005. A large portion of the town’s budget now goes to debt maintenance.
- Create a fund to pay for road improvements so that roads can be continually maintained rather than depend on grants;
- Audit all outside billing by contractors to the town;
- Close the “Real Estate Developer’s Loophole” in our business tax abatement program. Currently, the ordinance allows an empty strip mall receive an abatement. Such a business consumes services yet provides neither jobs nor revenue. The abatement should be adjusted so that only businesses that create jobs can receive benefit. **Hammonton has an unemployment rate of 7.2 %** in contrast with Winslow (6.3%), Vineland (6.5%) and Galloway (5.2%).
- Implement a three-year budget forecast, so the Council can conduct better planning.

This platform is the commitment that is needed to ensure that our town has a strong financial foundation. It requires some sacrifice from everyone. But sacrifice is part of Hammonton's middle-class work ethics. For those of us that go to work everyday or spent a life-time working, we know what it takes to overcome life's challenges.

We also want to say that this platform is not an indictment of any member of the local government. We appreciate any person who answers the call to public service and we consider all members of the Council to be personal friends. Our disagreement is based on policy and the direction of Hammonton.

Sometimes, people think disagreement is negative; it supposedly interferes with progress. Disagreement is an important part of the process. Deliberation prevents any one group from seizing power. It ensures that decisions are well-thought out and all opinions are presented. Rather than being divisive, the freedom for well-intentioned people to debate important issues actually unites us not just as Hammontonians but also as Americans.

So the Hammonton Democrats will continue to present our policies to the public. And with help from the voters of Hammonton, we will begin implementing those policies on Town Council. All of Hammonton can then triumph in the Promise of the Future rather than Satisfaction of the Now.

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