

Mayor of Souderton Dan Yocum Mayor's Memo!



This Mayor's Memo was published as an Op-Ed in the Souderton Independent in November, so some of you may have already read it. But most probably haven't. And despite publicly discussing our municipal budget for months, sharing it in the newspaper, on social media, and on the Borough website, the vast majority of people are not engaged in the discussion. I get it! Taxes are confusing, and for many of us they are escrowed in our mortgage so we don't pay much attention. So I could realistically save myself a lot of headache and heartache by not mentioning your significant tax increase this year. But, as I hope you know by now, that is not the type of Mayor I choose to be for Souderton.

Borough Manager Stacy Crandell is a few months into her new job. And like any Executive taking over a leadership position, we are seeing a dramatic shift in Souderton Borough administration. Mike Coll led our Borough with a steady hand for four decades. Now Stacy is bringing a new perspective, new priorities, modernizations, industry insights, and a new energy to Souderton. For our elected officials, the change is exciting...and admittedly challenging.

It probably comes as no surprise that Souderton does a lot of things "because that's the way they've always been done". Our Borough operates far differently than most other municipalities. The result has been an enormous tax savings to the residents over the years. We have often prioritized fiscal responsibility over practicality. Instead of buying new, we have always bought used. Instead of streamlining systems, we have purchased the cheapest add-on. Instead of hiring additional staff, we have asked our current employees to do more. I think of it like a leaking roof; we put out buckets instead of spending what is truly needed for a permanent replacement.

Over my past roughly 10 years on Borough Council and as Mayor, I have been a big advocate for these types of policies. When you're at the decision-making table spending taxpayer money, it is always more attractive to choose the less expensive option. It was the decades of institutional knowledge that we had in place that allowed us to piecemeal our operations together in this way. But Stacy has brought a different perspective. She has shown us that most municipalities in the 21st Century do not operate like Souderton Borough. She is orchestrating several dramatic changes that you will certainly notice in years to come. We now have a new Borough website that is easy to navigate and where you can find all the information you need to know. She is in discussions with a technology consultant to help modernize our operating systems; it is my goal to have auto-pay for our Borough bills very soon! Stacy is looking to formalize a road, alley, and sidewalk replacement program so that we have a set schedule to repair and replace our streets in need. She is working through ways to improve your experience at Souderton Pool and with other amenities throughout the Borough. She and Chief Brian Newhall are working on ways to make our Police Department more efficient to better protect our citizens. She is studying our real estate assets to determine their best usage. Stacy has been here for less than four months, so a lot of this is still non-specific. But under Stacy's leadership, residents will start to notice a dramatic shift in "the way things have always been done".

Despite operating on a shoestring budget in the past, you may have noticed that Souderton Borough has also raised taxes almost every year since I can remember. Let me give you a little insight into how those meetings tend to go year after year; Our Borough Auditor presents to Council that we are in a safe and solvent position, but that funds are tight and we really need to increase our “rainy-day fund”. Next, Mike Coll goes over every line item of the approximately \$4.7 Million budget. At that point, it is always obvious to Council that we do not have enough tax revenue to cover our wants and needs. Mike formulates a tax increase that would fully cover those needs. Council gets nervous, not wanting to upset the residents. We ask Mike if the Borough can do more with less. He agrees, and Council votes to make an incremental tax increase that we hope can slide by under the radar, knowing full well that we will probably have to make another incremental tax increase the following year. We continue to piece together projects and services, and we never add a dollar to the rainy-day fund. It has worked. But not well.

Stacy and Borough Council are proposing a different strategy this year. She has big plans for Souderton. And in order to make those plans happen, she needs adequate tax revenue. Council is proposing a 2.5 mill increase to Souderton Borough taxes. This is a change in mindset. It is significant. More than we have ever done. If I was trying to hide that fact, I would not be writing this Mayors Memo. But it will allow us to move Souderton into the 21st Century, and prevent me from writing this same Mayors Memo in January year, after year, after year.

Pennsylvania municipalities express tax rates as “mills”. One mill equates to \$1 of property tax for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. Montgomery County has not re-assessed property values since 1997, so the average assessed value of a home in Souderton Borough is roughly \$150,000. Some homes are assessed at significantly more than that, and some significantly less. But roughly speaking, every one mill of taxes equates to about \$150 a year to the average resident. Last year the average property owner paid about \$900, or \$75 a month in taxes to Souderton Borough. This year, that will increase to an average of about \$1,200 a year, or \$100 a month. Per our contract with Mascaro, there will also be a \$5 increase to your quarterly trash bill.

Your volunteer elected officials make decisions based on what we think is best for residents. There are realistic alternatives that would present huge savings to our annual budget. We could save about \$1 Million a year by eliminating Souderton Police Department and instead be covered by State Police like Schwenksville Borough. We could save hundreds of thousands in maintenance and upkeep each year by privatizing our Sewer Treatment Plant like Towamencin Township. We could eliminate amenities and outsource our Public Works Department like some other municipalities. But we feel that those decisions are not right for Souderton. And short of huge changes of that nature, you’ll find that our operating budget is still very conservative. Souderton Borough Council is taking a bold step, acknowledging that some of you may not agree. But with the optimism that you will take notice of your tax dollars at work in 2024 and beyond.

Neighboring Borough Millages in 2023	
Borough	Millage
Sellersville	27.00
Dublin	21.25
Doylestown	18.34
Chalfont	18.25
Norristown	17.00
Pottstown	14.23
Silverdale	13.00
Bryn Athen	11.11
Hatboro	10.63
Perkasie	9.25
Ambler	8.82
Pennsburg	8.73
Royersford	8.70
Collegeville	7.55
Lansdale	7.25
Souderton	7.25
Telford	7.14
Schwenksville	7.00
E. Greenville	6.75
North Wales	6.00
Hatfield	3.25
Green Lane	2.50
Quakertown	1.63