

David Cohen - Remarks for Princeton Municipal Reorganization 2018

When deciding whether or not to run for Council about a year ago, I was reminded of a favorite story my father liked to tell about his imaginary Uncle Itzik. One day Uncle Itzik saw a help-wanted ad in the newspaper for someone to lead an expedition to the heart of the Congo: “qualified candidate must have large game hunting experience, wilderness survival training, and nerves of steel.” Itzik rushed right down to the employment agency and presented himself to the receptionist. Now you should know that Uncle Itzik was about 70 years old at the time, all of 5’-2” and maybe 104 pounds soaking wet. The receptionist was very skeptical – didn’t even want to let him in to see the job placement officer. She looked him up and down: “you say you have large game hunting experience?” Itzik replied, “vell not exactly – I haff set my fair share of mouse traps over de years, though.” “And what about wilderness survival training?” she asked. “to be perfectly honest, once by accident, I got on de wrong subway and ended up in the Bronx . . . otherwise, no.” “I don’t suppose you can give an example when you have demonstrated nerves of steel?” she continued. Itzik replied, “my vife says I got a lotta chutzpah, but mostly just when I kvetch about her cooking.” Finally, running out of patience, the receptionist asked: “so what on earth made you think you should respond to the ad for this position?” “Actually,” Itzik confided “I just wanted to let you know, for dis job, don’t count on me!”

Ultimately, unlike Uncle Itzik, I decided – for this job, do count on me! As Mayor Lempert’s remarks made clear, many of the challenges Princeton faces in the coming year and beyond revolve around questions of how to manage development: how to balance the pressure for growth with a desire to preserve the unique character of our town; how to maintain affordability and diversity without sacrificing quality of life; how to create a more sustainable community for our children and grandchildren without pricing them out of the market? As an architect, I have been thinking about these kinds of questions for many years, and, as a member of Council, I have chosen to serve on committees and as liaison to community groups that grapple with them week in and week out. There are no easy answers, but principles of Smart Growth provide a blueprint for how to think about the challenges we face. I won’t get into what those principles are just now – it would be rude to keep you any longer from the wonderful reception that awaits - but I encourage anyone in the community who wants to hear more, and to share their own ideas about how to steer Princeton toward a vibrant, embracing, and optimistic future, to join me any Wednesday morning at Bon Appetit from 8:00-9:00 am.