

Court Is Losing Money

To the Editor:

Wouldn't it be nice if we could count all our income and just half our expenses? Then it would be easy to make a profit. That is what Clinton Township Mayor Kevin Cimei, Council President Steve Krommenhoek and Administrator Marvin Joss did when they told us the new municipal court made a \$200,000 profit last year.

It sounded impossible so I examined the payments made in 2008 and the 2009 budget posted on the township Web site. A \$200,000 profit — nothing could be further from the truth.

They counted the revenue from fines and court costs and subtracted the salaries of court employees, judge, prosecutor and public defender. Then they stopped. They stopped counting expenses and proclaimed a miracle! The new court is making money! How great are we!

Unfortunately, taxpayers have to foot the bill for other expenses. The numbers are there in the budget. Taxpayers paid for court employees' required pension payments, health benefits and payroll taxes. Then there are expenses for electricity, heat, maintenance, repairs, insurance and legal fees. We also had to pay to refurbish the new courtroom and court office space.

They also didn't subtract rent, one of the largest expenses most businesses have. Instead of rent, the council bought the "red roofer" for \$2 million, which made 8,000 additional square foot of office space available for municipal offices.

After shuffling various departments around, the bottom line is the new municipal court uses 5,000 square feet and police department expansion accounts for the other 3,000 square feet of space. Taxpayers paid a \$200,000 down payment

in 2008 for the red roofer and will have to pay the interest and principal on \$1.8 million of debt in the future. Proper accounting for court expenses must include an allocation of the down payment and amortization of interest and principal payments over the next 30 years.

When we account for all the expenses, the new municipal court is losing money in the same range as Clinton Township was losing as a member of the North Hunterdon joint municipal court. Surprising — not really, however, Council President Steve Krommenhoek and his running mates, Brian Mullay and Colleen Filak took credit last week for turning the new court's "\$70,000 loss into a \$200,000 profit." Their statement reminds me of the saying, when something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

Last week I presented Council with my estimates of the loss. They promised to review the numbers and respond. I asked them to explain the profit-making claim. Unfortunately neither the mayor, township administrator or Mr. Krommenhoek could defend it. The new municipal court's income statement and Mr. Krommenhoek's campaign claim appears to have been prepared by Bernie Madoff!

We cannot allow elected municipal officials (and those seeking office) to mislead us. It is time to elect officials with integrity and independence. Join me in supporting Jim Imbriaco, Peter Marra and Spencer Peck in the Republican primary. They have the experience, intelligence, commitment, leadership qualifications, independence and integrity we need now.

TOM BORKOWSKI

Former Mayor

Clinton Township