

NEWS

Longtime residents of Strausstown fondly recall borough of yesteryear

By **ANTHONY OROZCO** |

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After a ham dinner with three generations of his family, Harvey Stambaugh, 81, reminisced with lifelong friend and neighbor Vera Breidigan, 80, about the Strausstown Borough of yesteryear.

Over coffee, Stambaugh chatted about his 75 years in the community, including serving on borough council for 35 years, 18 of them as president.

“I was on council, basically, because if you are going to live in the community, why not try to make it a better place to live in,” Stambaugh said last week.

In the same vein, Stambaugh said he joined more than 400 other Strausstown and Upper Tulpehocken Township residents who voted in the April 26 primary to merge the two municipalities.

“I think it was a good move merging with the township,” Stambaugh said. “We are a small borough and the way we are, we don’t have room to expand, and with the expenses we either have to struggle or keep putting the taxes up; so, it did benefit the people.”

Breidigan said the issue of taxes was her primary concern.

“That’s pretty much what I knew about it: the lower taxes,” said Breidigan, who



When the borough is absorbed into the township on July 1, borough residents will see taxes drop from 3 mills to 1.8 mills, or to an annual bill of about \$180, down from \$300, for a property assessed at \$100,000.

The millage rate is the combination of Upper Tulpehocken's 0.8 mill real estate tax and a 1 mill streetlight tax for residents who benefit from that service, which is mainly in the borough.

Strausstown residents voted 97-6 in favor of the merger, while Upper Tulpehocken residents supported it by a 318-107 margin, according to complete but unofficial county election results.

The proposal passed with nearly 80 percent of the total vote, but not everyone was convinced about the benefits in terms of taxes and cost savings, said Upper Tulpehocken Supervisor Wilson M. Balthaser, board chairman.

"I was kind of surprised up until the end," Balthaser said. "A few people talked to me, and they just couldn't understand it was a good decision, which I thought it was."

Some people just couldn't be persuaded to support the merger, according to Upper Tulpehocken resident and merger committee member Gary Rosenblatt.

The 11-member merger committee, made up of borough and township residents and officials, investigated the effects of the change and provided information to voters.

Rosenblatt and Balthaser were stationed outside the Upper Tulpehocken polling place during the primary to distribute information and answer questions.

They said many people who arrived at the polls as skeptics decided to support the merger once presented with information about its effects.

Some voters saw the benefit of absorbing the borough and its high-density residential zoning, which the township does not have, as a way to prevent the township from being forced to allow a high-density housing development elsewhere in the rural municipality, Balthaser said.

Once the merger takes effect, Strausstown will become a village.

Stambaugh and Breidigan said they weren't worried about the borough losing its



Stambaugh agreed, stating that many people do not have the motivation to keep organizations such as the Lions Club, the Women's Club and church groups active.

"I really could not say that it will change the identity of Strausstown," Stambaugh said. "The identity of Strausstown was made by the people who lived in town itself, people loved the community."

Balthaser said he feels confident about the merger and the future of the township.

"It may be a challenge, but I think we're up for it," he said. "It is good, too, that we are keeping the merger committee for a year so we can discuss things together."

Contact Anthony Orozco: 610-371-5015 or aorozco@readingeagle.com.



Anthony Orozco



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