

“Lawrence Township has to do more to revitalize our small business community, to bring back jobs and rateables to our town,” Councilman Rick Miller declared after he and his running mate, Ginny Bigley recently toured the township’s local business districts.

“The number of vacant storefronts, office buildings, and commercial lots around town is staggering,” Bigley added. “And it’s clear that the majority of these empty locations have been that way for a long time – it’s not just because of the recent recession.”

“The days of sitting back and waiting for new businesses to come to Lawrence are over,” Miller said. “We have to be much more aggressive in attracting new businesses to our community. New businesses create jobs and help keep our tax rate down.”

“We need to do a top-to-bottom review of our policies and procedures to make sure that Lawrence Township is open for business,” Bigley asserted. “I want Lawrence Township to be considered to be a place that welcomes new jobs and works with entrepreneurs and small business owners to encourage them to locate here.”

“As we have talked with small business owners during this campaign, we’ve heard many helpful suggestions,” Miller recalled. “They include streamlining our permitting and inspection process to make sure applicants know from the beginning what they need to do. We need to make sure our different departments are working together to avoid duplication of effort, contradictory advice, and unnecessary delays.”

“We also need to review our sign ordinance, which many local business owners and real estate professionals have told us is much stricter than neighboring towns,” Bigley said. “We need to make sure that ordinance – part of which was struck down by the state Supreme Court earlier this year as too restrictive – is not making it difficult for businesses to make themselves known to potential customers.”

“Attracting new businesses – and keeping the ones we have – is indispensable to keeping Lawrence Township an affordable place to live,” Miller stated. “The taxes paid on vacant commercial properties are much lower than when those properties are occupied by a business. We can increase revenue without increasing the tax rate if we can fill those vacant storefronts and office buildings up. That benefits everybody.”

“We also need to make sure we are making things easier for people who are improving their own homes,” Bigley concluded. “Of course, everyone is expected to meet the standards of the building code – that makes sure any new construction is safe. But the permitting process should not be an obstacle course designed to trip people up. It should be designed to help people get through it efficiently and expeditiously.”