

Tax Reform Forum Held

At Shippensburg, Pa.

by Alanna Hartzok,
Chambersburg, PA

Public officials, community leaders, and the wider public came to a Tax Reform Forum at Shippensburg University on May 2 to learn more about the benefits or potential drawbacks of the so-called "split-rate" or "two-rate" local tax reform now being implemented in 16 cities in Pennsylvania. The Forum was organized by the Policy Development Committee of the Greater Chambersburg 2000 Partnership's Housing Task Force.

Housing Task Force Co-Chair Alanna Hartzok was Forum Coordinator and Moderator. The idea for the forum emerged from the search for ways to encourage access to quality affordable housing. Other concerns discussed included the economic development impacts of the split-rate tax, how it might curb sprawl and speculation and affect homeowners, renters, industrial and commercial property and farmers.

Other presentors at the Forum included:

Mike Waters, Co-Chair, Housing Task Force of the Greater Chambersburg 2000 Partnership;

Senator Terry L. Punt, Chair of the Senate Community and Economic Development Committee;

John E. Gardner, Jr., Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs;
Joshua Vincent, Research Associate,

Center for the Study of Economics, Columbia, MD;

Mayor Anthony Spossey, Washington, PA;

Ben Howells, Jr., Former councilman and planner for 20 years, Allentown, PA;

Walter Rybeck, Director, Center for Public Dialog, Kensington, MD;

Dan Sullivan, Founder, Pennsylvania Fair Tax Coalition, Pittsburgh.

Among the approximately 65 people who attended were several Pennsylvania State Legislators and/or their staff.

Senator Terry Punt, who chairs the Senate's Community and Economic Development Committee, gave an enthusiastic report of the current progress of SB 211, a bill he is sponsoring which would extend the two-rate tax option to the nearly 1000 boroughs of the state. The bill has recently passed out of the Local Government Committee and is now in Appropriations. Passage of the bill by the entire Senate could happen in the next few weeks.

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Rep. Stephen R. Maitland and Rep. Jeffrey Coy attended. Staff members of Senator Robert Jubeliere, the President of the PA State Senate, who is now also a co-sponsor of SB 211, and of Senator Punt, Rep. Patrick Fleagle and Rep. Coy were also present.

Borough Managers and Council members came from throughout southcentral Pennsylvania and other areas as well, including Chambersburg, Shippensburg, Greencastle, Waynesboro, Gettysburg, Fairfield, Mt. Holly Springs and Erie. Economics and business management professors from Shippensburg University also took time to attend the Forum.

About 20 people who are educators and activists for this policy approach came to the Forum from the Philadelphia Area, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and one from Switzerland.

News coverage for the Forum was excellent as there were at least five stories published. Preceding the event, substantial stories appeared in the Chambersburg Public Opinion, the Shippensburg News-Chronicle, and The Record Herald of Waynesboro.

Afterwards, the Chambersburg Public Opinion's story was entitled "Two-Tier Tax System Gets Hearing At SU" and quoted several of the presentors. The Harrisburg Patriot-News published a Capitol Commerce story by Stephanie Ebbert which began with, "While property-

tax reform is crawling along at its predictably slow pace, another tax strategy is gaining momentum." The article pointed out that the "concept isn't revolutionary; it's been right under legislators' noses in the Capitol for some time. But it is groundbreaking in that it could reduce residential property taxes and promote sound urban policy at the same time."

Mayor Anthony Sposey was quoted that in his city of Washington, PA, 70% of the property owners benefited.

"We don't view this as tax reform, we look at it more as a tool for community and economic development," John Gardner, Jr., Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, was quoted in the Chambersburg paper.

Co-Sponsors of the Tax Reform Forum included: Sen. Terry L. Punt; Rep. Jeffrey W. Coy; Rep. Jerry L. Nailor; PA State Assn. of Boroughs; Borough of Chambersburg; Borough of Mt. Holly Springs; Borough of Shippensburg; Center for Sustainable Living at Wilson College; Chambersburg Community Improvement Assn.; Chambersburg Unity coalition; Common Ground, USA; Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund; Franklin County Rental Property Owners Assn.; Fruitbelt Farmworker Christian Ministry; Dr. Kim Fox, professor, Shippensburg Univ.; Henry George School of Social Science; Dr. Stephen J. Holoviak, professor, Shippensburg Univ.; The Housing Authority of the

County of Franklin; Pennsylvania Fair Tax Coalition; 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania. (See related article on page 11.)

Tax Forum Video Available

An excellent professionally produced videotape of the entire Tax Reform Forum is now available. The

videotape is in two parts and is 2 hours and 38 minutes long.

For a copy of the video send a check for \$25, which includes shipping and handling, as well as copies of the five news stories, to Alanna Hartzok, P.O. Box 328, Scotland, PA 17254. For further details you may contact her at 717-264-0957 or email: earthrts@pa.net.



Dan Sullivan, Jack Gardner



Senator Terry Punt



Walt Rybeck