ELECTION 2015

A Guide to the Candidates
Pair of Local Officials Seek District 2 Board of Legislators Seat

By Neal Rentz

Two local municipal officials are seeking the open District 2 seat on the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

Bedford Councillman Francis Corcoran, a Republican, who has been on the town board for 13 years, faces Democratic three-year Mount Kisco village Trustee Karen Schleimer.

The winner will take the seat about Dec. 1 once the election is certified because of Peter Harckham's resignation earlier this year. Interim Legislator Alan Cole was appointed in June to represent the district.

Reasons for Running

Schleimer, 65, said she accepted overtures to run for the seat from the Northern Westchester Coalition.

“I felt that I had made good strides in Mount Kisco. I accomplished a lot of things for a fair number of people,” Schleimer said. “And I thought the opportunity to do it on a larger platform was a tremendous opportunity and maybe I could really make a difference.”

Schleimer, a real estate attorney, also served on the village zoning board for about 25 years, was a village prosecutor and a planning board member.

Corcoran, 52, who grew up in Bedford and spent his career in the financial industry, said he decided to run after Peter Harckham departed.

“We’re different than down county. Our needs are different,” said Corcoran. “We send a lot of money to the county and a lot of folks don’t think we get back what we give.”

He added that his town board experience would be valuable.

“I have an obligation to run because I know I can be a leader for up here, represent us down there and have a strong voice that will be heard,” he said.

Affordable Housing Settlement

Corcoran said he agreed with County Executive Rob Astorino that it is federal government overreach to force municipalities to change their zoning to provide affordable housing or to approve the model ordinance, which calls for 10 percent of new housing projects to contain affordable units. Bedford not only approved the ordinance, but strengthened it, he said.

If elected, Corcoran said he would sit down with municipalities that have not approved the model ordinance and explain what has been done with affordable housing in Bedford. The town has been in the forefront of providing affordable units through the Blue Mountain Development Corporation.

The town board also recently approved zoning revisions to allow affordable housing in former light industrial zones, he said.

Schleimer said her background in planning and zoning would be helpful to the Board of Legislators, particularly with the housing settlement. She’s also had experience as a negotiator and has been a commercial arbitrator.

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Finishing the 750 units will likely go down to the wire, Schleimer said.

“The federal government wants to accomplish a goal. The towns have been willing to step (up) and try to meet that goal,” she said. “I think there’s a lot of pressure to make this settlement work and I think no one wants to put us in a position where we’re going head to head with the federal government.”

There are some issues, such as septic and water, which makes it difficult for some northern Westchester municipalities to provide affordable housing, Schleimer said.

Water/Sewer Issues

Corcoran said he would advocate for the use of alternative water treatment systems in areas like Katonah and Pound Ridge, which are prone to septic problems. He has been involved with the Environment Facilities Corp., which provides low-cost financing and technical expertise to municipalities considering construction of sewage and water treatment facilities. The new town water treatment plant in Bedford is providing outstanding clean water, he said.

Schleimer agreed that water quality is an important issue for the district. Different and new technologies help to preserve water quality, such as shared septic systems, she said.

“You're grouping septic systems rather than having each unit have its own individual septic,” she said. “I would be happy to work with the towns in investigating whatever possibilities there are.”

Service Sharing

Corcoran and Schleimer both support the greater sharing of government services to reduce spending.

Schleimer said the consolidation of the Mount Kisco Police Department with the county Department of Public Safety, which began on June 1, has been successful.

“The response from the public has been overwhelmingly supportive,” she said. “There are many more cars and many more officers present. The response time is substantially improved. The specialized services are way above what we could offer as a small local department.”

Schleimer said that several former village police officers stayed on after the consolidation “You don’t feel that you’re among strangers,” she said. However, the consolidation remains a work in progress. The county is willing to work with village officials to improve the new arrangement, she said.

Schleimer said there could be infrastructure that could be shared between the county and municipalities, but she wanted to study the issue, including what has been done with shared services elsewhere in the country.

Corcoran said Bedford has shared services with other municipalities, including sharing a machine to clear catch basins. He would continue to pursue other opportunities with the county.

Budget Issues

Corcoran said Bedford officials navigated through some of the most difficult financial times since The Great Depression and still managed to maintain the town’s AAA bond rating, part of a smaller fraternity of towns and cities in the state to have that rating, he said.

Corcoran said the town hasn’t cut services since he’s been on the board and has a healthy fund balance.

“I don’t think there’s anybody who has run for this seat or held this seat, and I don’t know anybody on the county level, that has the kind of level of background that I have,” Corcoran said.

Corcoran, who would likely arrive in time to vote on the 2016 budget, said he would start analyzing the spending plan when it is released before he would take office and would meet with legislators.

In addition to his town board service, Corcoran has been appointed to unpaid positions to work on financial issues, including chairman of the inspector general’s office for the MTA, serving under four governors.

Corcoran said the county should seek specific industries “and try to get a niche in that industry” by using temporary tax incentives and using a corporate spokesperson who would tout the benefits of doing business in Westchester. The county should speak with high level executives to encourage them to move their companies to the county, he said.

Corcoran said early retirement incentives have resulted in a drastic reduction of county government staff and she is concerned about departments being decimated. Also, infrastructure projects that have been delayed could endanger public safety, she said.

Current legislators have been helping to familiarize Schleimer with the budget process. She has been involved with the Mount Kisco budget in her work as a trustee.

Both candidates agreed that the county should not borrow for operating expenses such as pension costs and tax certiorari refunds.

“It’s not a healthy way to finance a budget,” Corcoran said. “We don’t do that in Bedford.”

Corcoran said the county should consider seeking revenues other than raising property taxes. Charging a user fee to allow commercial vehicles to use county parkways was one idea.

“There’s got to be ways you can find things to generate revenue,” he said.

Schleimer also was uncomfortable with borrowing for operating expenses.

“I’m really concerned about not being able to meet your current expenses and doing it by borrowing.”

Corcoran said Corcoran’s campaign for seeking efficiencies and searching for savings in the budget’s other areas without damaging needed services is crucial, Schleimer said.

If the county cannot balance its budget after seeking cost savings, it should seek federal and state funding, Schleimer said. Borrowing should be a last resort, she said.

County Politics

Schleimer said Astorino has been a factor in the campaign and has been helping with funding for Corcoran’s campaign.

“Maybe not overtly, but he (Astorino) is definitely a factor,” Schleimer said.

Though she is on an all-Democratic board, Schleimer said working with county Republicans would not pose a problem.

“I basically do my own independent evaluation,” said Schleimer, who added that she has not always agreed with her Democratic colleagues on the Mount Kisco board.

Corcoran said he would take reasonable positions without an agenda when dealing with county issues.

Other Comments

Corcoran said he was not running for this seat to run for another position in the future.

“I love northern Westchester,” he said.

Schleimer said she is proud of her public service record and has met great people while campaigning.

“They know that I’m willing to go the extra mile,” Schleimer said. “I’m doing this only because I think I can make a positive contribution.”
Active Community Members Featured in District 3 BOL Showdown

By Martin Wilbur

Sometimes the participants in a campaign reveal themselves months before petitions are circulated. Other times the candidates can be somewhat of a surprise.

The matchup in this year’s race for the Board of Legislators’ District 3 seat didn’t take shape until summer. In early June, former New Castle councilman and ex-North Castle Democrat co-chairman John Diaconis jumped into the contest, presumably to take on current Republican incumbent Michael Smith.

However, by July, Smith had decided to bow out, in large part due to his increased responsibilities as president of Berkeley College. In his place, the Republicans are running Margaret Cunzio, a lifelong resident of the district, which is comprised of North Castle, Mount Pleasant and Pleasantville, who is making her first run for public office.

Reasons for Running

Cunzio, 40, is a former school teacher who grew up in Armonk and graduated from Byram Hills High School. For the past 16 years she has lived in Thornwood, with her husband, Michael, who is principal of Mount Pleasant’s Columbus Elementary School. Cunzio is a professor in the education department at Iona College and Western Connecticut State University in Danbury.

She said she would be a fresh voice that would benefit the Board of Legislators.

“I’m approachable, I listen to a lot of people. I speak to a lot of people and I have a lot of information and experience behind me that I think I can bring to the table and bring a new perspective to county government, especially in District 3,” said Cunzio, who volunteers for the SPCA of Westchester in Briarcliff Manor and Second Chance Rescue in the city and has served on the Mount Pleasant Architectural Review Board.

When he lived in New Castle, Diaconis, 61, served nearly five years on that town board, having been appointed in early 2001 to fill a vacancy, then winning a four-year term that November. After moving to Armonk nearly six years ago, he joined the town’s Democratic Committee and has also served as treasurer of the Friends of Miller House. For the past year, Diaconis, an attorney, has been co-chair of North Castle’s Ethics Task Force.

Diaconis was motivated to run because of the county’s inertia over the Elijah Miller House, but there are a number of other issues he wants to hone in on.

“I find that I’ve got a fair amount of experience and qualifications to serve the county and to make it better,” said Diaconis. “Not only am I interested in restoring the Miller House but I think I can, because of my experience with shared services, really help keep taxes low. I think shared services is sort of an untapped strategy that can be used better.”

Affordable Housing Settlement

Cunzio is a critic of the 2009 settlement agreement that mandates the county complete building 750 units of new affordable units by the end of next year. She said that many county and district residents likely don’t realize that the residences are not workforce housing, not senior housing, where there is a dearth of options for retirees on fixed incomes who want to downsize, and it’s being marketed outside the county.

There also remains the threat of the federal government imposing greater conditions than what the settlement calls for. Cunzio said she would defend the county against a federal agency that may threaten to dictate local policies from afar.

“It’s not just about home rule,” Cunzio said. “What the federal government has done is they have the four corners of the agreement, but they’re trying to go outside of that and that basically undermines all the local zoning. What then does the local government have to say?”

Diaconis said he has experience in dealing with issues surrounding affordable housing issues. He successfully defended the Town of Yorktown several years ago against the federal government.

While Diaconis acknowledges that the federal government does try to intimidate through aggressive, hard-nosed litigation tactics, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) cannot dictate changes to the agreement. Therefore, it is up to county officials to remain composed, not antagonize and comply with the agreed upon requirements

“The requirement is a consent decree to build 750 units, do an Analysis of Impediments, and once that’s done, those two things are done, it’s over,” he said.

Shared Services

This is an area that Diaconis believes the county can provide a greater role than it’s doing in order to encourage more sharing of services and ultimately to save taxpayers money.

On the New Castle Town Board, he saw how that town had partnered with Pleasantville to jointly operate the water treatment plant in Millwood. The county could help connect municipalities to share heavy equipment, DPW trucks or other possibilities.

“Shared services is one of my passions,” Diaconis said. “I think it needs to be tapped. There’s a lot of low-hanging fruit there and I think if we get serious about it, we can make big strides.”

Cunzio advocates opening lines of communication between the county and local governments to learn what the needs are and what areas can be explored.

“You don’t get change unless you start having a dialogue and I think that’s really the first step,” she said.

She applauded the Village of Mount Kisco for its police consolidation with the county, which is forecasted to save the municipality $2.4 million over five years. Cunzio acknowledged that step is not for every community and local and county leaders don’t want to diminish quality of life, but there are greater opportunities to pursue.

Taxes

One of Cunzio’s key campaign platforms is keeping taxes low to allow younger people after graduating college to live here and for seniors to remain in the county after they retire on fixed incomes.

She pledged to be as vigilant with the public’s money as she is with her own. It’s also an area that she has experience with as an education administrator.

“You have to look at the budget with a new perspective and find creative ways to save money, whether that was consolidation of services, whether that is looking at programs that are maybe overlapping in services, whether we can streamline things,” Cunzio said. “I have a lot of experience with that and I’ve worked with other entities and organizations.”

Diaconis said she would borrow for operating expenses only as a last resort.

Diaconis stated that although there has been no tax levy increase for the five years that County Executive Rob Astorino has been in office, borrowing to achieve stable taxes is a mistake.

He said that he would examine the budget and look for unnecessary or redundant expenses and what revenues can be expanded.

Miller House

This hot-button issue, particularly in North Castle, was Diaconis’ original motivation for running for this seat. He said regardless of where the county ultimately decides the 1738 house should stand – it is located on Virginia Road next to a cement plant – the structure needs to be immediately stabilized before a storm knocks it down and is lost forever.

That would improve the county’s credibility on the issue, not only for many North Castle residents but all those who want to see history preserved.

“Let’s get the house fixed right away so it doesn’t collapse,” Diaconis said.

The goal of the county should be to keep the house open to visitors, establish memberships and fundraisers and open it for school trips, he said.

Diaconis called the county’s various discussions to move the house “a diversionary tactic.” The latest talks have the county considering a move to Miller Hill, but a steep topography would likely discourage any visitors and stormwater runoff could place the house in peril.

Diaconis said it is feasible to improve the area in front of the house to bring in a bus or a small number of vehicles.

Cunzio strongly stated that the county must not shirk its responsibility to maintain Miller House and come up with a plan. However, since it has been seven years since the last environmental study, another one should be undertaken as soon as possible to guide officials on the best course of action, she said.

“It’s one thing to fix it,” Cunzio said. “Then you need a plan in place to maintain it.”

Exploration of public private partnerships should also be done to help, similar to some other historical sites, she said.
Newcomers Clash in Race for New Castle Town Board

By Martin Wilbur

Four first-time town board candidates are featured in this year’s New Castle elections next Tuesday.

While they’re each running for the seat for the first time, all either have become involved in various aspects of the community or have longstanding ties to the town.

Running on the Republican-endorsed Team New Castle 2.0 ticket with incumbent town supervisor Robert Greenstein, is Eileen Gallagher, who chaired the Coyote Management Task Force, one of two committees that submitted recommendations to the board earlier this year on how to handle increased coyote sightings, and newcomer Seth Chodosh, who has recently returned to town after graduating from Horace Greeley High School in 1990.

On the Democratic side, Hala Makowska, the chair of the Millwood Board of Fire Commissioners, is joined by Jeremy Saland, one of New Castle’s three town prosecutors. At the top of their ticket is Victoria Alzapiedi, who chaired the Coyote Awareness and Safety Advisory Committee.

Seth Chodosh

Chodosh, 43, said he entered the race after he signed Greenstein’s petition one morning at the train station on his way to his Manhattan dog jogging business.

They began talking, and since the Republicans were looking for another candidate to round out the ticket, Greenstein asked him to consider joining. Team New Castle for the election.

Chodosh said he was caught by surprise, but after thinking about the offer decided to give it a shot, a decision made easier because he has been impressed with Greenstein’s style and substance during his nearly two years in office.

“I like all the things that he was doing, he has a certain personality that maybe I can see some people not liking, but I like him,” Chodosh said. “In my opinion, he can get things done.”

Improving the downtown hamlets’ infrastructure and making them more pedestrian friendly so the business centers are more attractive for merchants and shoppers is the most important issue for Chodosh. Downtown Chappaqua, which he remembered growing up, lacked the vitality that was present a generation earlier, he said.

Then he went with his wife to Armonk and Chodosh said he couldn't believe the difference. Armonk’s downtown was hopping and he wondered why Chappaqua couldn't be similar.

“Sometimes little things are not as well done and for Chappaqua that shouldn’t be the case,” he said. “The Armonk thing is what set me off and then I thought maybe you can do something, maybe you can’t, but let me give it a shot.”

One of those small things to attract business, and ultimately more revenue, is a more walkable community with better sidewalks.

“That would be my first thing, because with that, retail stores might be willing to pay a higher rent,” Chodosh said. “You can bring in that traffic flow, the pedestrian traffic flow, and that’s what we need.”

When Chodosh was going to Greeley, he remembered a bustling Reader’s Digest campus. Chappaqua Crossing has replaced that, and it has been a monumental struggle for the developer and the town to reach this point. Although hardly a perfect plan, Chodosh said ultimately increasing the commercial tax base is a top priority and is a better option than building more residential developments.

“If you have to do something, I think having Whole Foods and having all the stores, they have to be a certain size limiting the stores so you don’t have a strip mall,” he said. “I think that is a good thing, I guess.”

Like all of this year’s candidates, Chodosh is opposed to the Conifer affordable housing project at the cramped Hunts Lane site. He would have liked to have seen the project in another location, such as the town-owned Washington Avenue site, although that presents other obstacles.

He praised the ability of the town to obtain state grant money to extend sidewalks and crosswalks around Millwood Plaza, a key component of a plan to revitalize that hamlet.

A self-described fiscal conservative, Chodosh said he would also be equipped to make the hard decisions about how to save money in the budget.

One project that Chodosh said he would propose is a dog park somewhere in town. While it’s great exercise for dogs, it’s also a good venue for residents to be sociable.

Eileen Gallagher

Active as a volunteer in the schools, at church and in the community, Gallagher said she was approached by the town’s Republican Committee earlier this year and decided to join Greenstein on the ticket.

She has been a regular visitor to town board meetings, in part because of her affiliation with Chappaqua for Responsible Affordable Housing (CFRAH), and also as a freelancer for Inside Chappaqua, so she is not stranger to Town Hall.

Gallagher, 50, a former accountant and teacher, became ensnared in the coyote controversy last winter when the two committees were unable to bridge many of their differences. That episode, however, failed to dissuade Gallagher from running, and she said ultimately the town now has excellent guidelines that will enhance safety for residents and pets and increase awareness of the issue.

“I can either say no if I want to keep out of the political fray or I can say I’m not going to let that stop me and do what I think is right, and I really feel that I will assist the town,” Gallaghers said of her decision to run.

Regarding Chappaqua Crossing, Gallagher said while there are residents who are unhappy that a retail center will be part of the site’s redevelopment, Greenstein and the current board were able to get the best possible resolution for the site. Getting a Whole Foods for the town – Chappaqua currently does not have a supermarket – is a net gain, she said.

Compromises rather than continued threats of litigation is a positive for New Castle.

“I think they did a very good job with that,” Gallagher said. “I’m happy how that turned out, I’m happy we’ve worked with Summit/Greenfield instead of continuing an adversarial relationship. We’ve come out with something better and I think it will benefit the town.”

Having affordable housing units in the cupola building will be another benefit, Gallagher said, although she would have liked to have seen several workforce units mixed in. It is preferable to have integrated housing, she said.

The Conifer site on Hunts Lane, however, runs against everything that the affordable housing agreement sought. Gallagher said she was also disappointed that Conifer refused to consider another location, such as Washington Avenue.

“Another location was presented to the town board but (Conifer) chose not to consider it,” she said. “It’s disheartening to me when I hear that, when people say, ‘Well, there’s no other location.’”

Gallagher said she would like to continued on page 8
Greenstein, Alzapiedi Square Off in New Castle Super Election

By Martin Wilbur

The race for the immediate future direction of New Castle will hang in the balance next week as the town’s Democrats and Republicans have offered voters full tickets for when they head to the polls.

With Republican backing, incumbent Supervisor Robert Greenstein will lead Team New Castle 2.0, accompanied by running mates Eileen Gallagher and Seth Chodosh, against the Democrats’ supervisor’s candidate Victoria Alzapiedi and her running mates Hala Makowska and Jeremy Saland.

“I think what I like about this job is that there’s so much potential,” said Greenstein, 48, who is completing his first term. “We have so many exciting things right now.”

Alzapiedi was chair of the Coyote Awareness and Safety Advisory Committee and butted heads with Greenstein. Gallagher chaired what became the opposing Coyote Management Task Force.

While the town ultimately adopted a set of guidelines to use that was the result of recommendations from both committees, tensions had been frayed.

Alzapiedi, 49, said that her candidacy wasn’t a backlash against Greenstein after the coyote controversy broke, but it exposed deeper troubles with how the town was being led. She went to town board meetings and work sessions and noticed it wasn’t well-functioning body and many decisions were apparently being made by Greenstein on his own.

“I started imagining how I would do this and how I would lead a board that is much more cohesive and really welcome the input of all the other members,” she said.

One of the biggest issues of the past few years has been Chappaqua Crossing. Greenstein said that he wasn’t opposed to retail and wrote an online article about four years ago supporting Whole Foods coming to the hamlet. Furthermore, Greenstein indicated that he could support planning board member Thomas Curley’s plan, which was the traditional neighborhood design.

“I was never, ever against retail at Chappaqua Crossing,” Greenstein said. “I know that most people don’t think that but I was never against retail at Chappaqua Crossing.”

Rather Greenstein explained that when he and Team New Castle got into office, their objective was to get the best project they could get.

“We need to work with the developer to make this a win-win,” he said. “That’s something that we did. We made this a win-win. Yes, he’s getting a great project. He getting a better project. It’s a much better project.”

Alzapiedi countered that Greenstein has not been truthful during this campaign on his position on Chappaqua Crossing.

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Alzapiedi said that the current proposal before the planning board is too big with too much retail and she would have liked to have seen the square footing reduced because it will become a third hamlet and potentially jeopardize the existing business centers.

She also would have liked to have seen more of a housing component at Chappaqua Crossing.

Greenstein supports placing affordable housing into the cupola building. Currently, Wilder-Balter Partners is proposing 28 units of affordable housing, down from the original 32 that had been proposed by Summit/Greenfield. Most of the units are larger now, mainly one and two bedrooms and there are no more studios that are being proposed.

Both candidates have been against the Conifer affordable housing at Hunts Lane. Greenstein mentioned that when it was apparent that the town board couldn’t, they went to plead the town’s case to the state Board of Review and Metro-North, raising safety concerns to the entities that could still deny Conifer.

He pledged that if he were supervisor when the Conifer opens he would make a special effort to welcome the residents to the community.

Alzapiedi and her and her running mates want to bring specific activities or venues to entice people to shop, eat and stay in the downtown. They have proposed a “destination playground,” that would appeal to families with younger children; moving the New Castle Art Center from Hardscrabble Road to downtown; and offering an “Evening Under the Stars,” where tables and food vendors could be set up downtown on Saturdays night in the warm weather.

Attracting restaurants to downtown is also a priority, she said.

Although Alzapiedi first moved to New Castle in 2008, but it is the first time the place where she has lived has felt special.

“This is the first place that feels like home,” she said. “I have the feeling of wanting to protect it and preserve this wonderful place.”

Greenstein said between the planned streetscape and the upcoming completion of the Comprehensive Plan, the revitalization of downtown Chappaqua will begin.

He also disputed criticisms that he’s too argumentative.

“I think you want somebody who will go to bat for you,” Greenstein said. “I’m not saying I’m perfect. I’m certainly not perfect, but you take the good and the bad. I’m getting things done and I’m putting the best interests of the town first.”

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By Neal Rentz

Wayne McPartland is seeking to do what no other Democrat has done for a very long time – get elected to a council seat on the five-person, all-Republican Mount Pleasant Town Board.

McPartland is challenging incumbent Councilmen Mark Rubeo and Nicholas DiPaolo, who are running as a slate on the Republican, Conservative and Reform party lines.

Republican Supervisor Carl Fulgenzi is unopposed by the Democrats this fall.

Nicholas DiPaolo

DiPaolo, 37, is making his first run for public office. He was appointed to his seat earlier this year to succeed Fulgenzi, who became supervisor last fall, replacing Joan Maybury. The Hawthorne resident has been director of guidance for the past decade for the Mount Pleasant School District.

So far, DiPaolo’s experience on the board has been positive.

“I think we’re fortunate to have the makeup of the board that we have. We are very transparent in everything we do,” he said. “While there could be some disagreement, everyone is looking to get consensus. It’s a collaborative group.”

Prior to being appointed to the town board, DiPaolo was active in the community, a member of the Thornwood Lions Club and the Mount Pleasant Italian-American Club. He also acts as a service liaison for the Rotary Club and the Thornwood American Legion. As liaison, he strives to have students interact with the two organizations. He fulfills that same role for the school district, working to encourage students to be active in the community.

DiPaolo said he supported the town’s effort to seek state funds for downtown revitalization, which would include aesthetic improvements, such as lighting, plantings, façade upgrades and installation of new sidewalks.

The recent move of EF Academy, a boarding school for high school students on the old Legionaries property, has been very helpful to town merchants and has brought different cultures of students to Mount Pleasant, DiPaolo said.

“They’re wonderful neighbors,” he said. “I see nothing but positives.”

DiPaolo said the town board recently extended a commercial shopping zone down Columbus Avenue in an effort to increase business on the road. One of the new businesses he would like for the street would be a fresh produce market.

The town board is also working on a multiyear road improvement plan, DiPaolo said. It would be paid for through borrowing.

In response to the Feb. 3 accident at the Commerce Street railroad crossing in Valhalla that claimed six lives, the National Transportation Safety Board has asked the town to look at all of its crossings, DiPaolo said, and to devise a plan for improvements.

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Three Familiar Faces Vie for Two Seats on No. Castle Town Board

By Martin Wilbur

Regardless of the outcome of this year’s North Castle Town Board race, there shouldn’t be much of a learning curve needed for any of the candidates running for the two four-year terms that are up this year.

Republican councilmen Stephen D’Angelo and Guy Mezzancello are the current incumbents, but Democrat Jose Berra hopes to return to the board where he served for nearly a year.

D’Angelo is completing his first full term on the board after his election in 2011. Mezzancello, a former planning board member, narrowly won a special election over Berra last November to complete the final year of Michael Schiliro’s unexpired term after Schiliro was elected supervisor two years ago.

Meanwhile, Berra who finished third in a four-candidate race in 2013, was appointed in January 2014 to fill the vacancy created by Schiliro before being defeated by Mezzancello in last November’s cliffhanger, which took about three weeks to decide. Berra has remained visible throughout the year in preparation for this year’s election.

Schiliro is unopposed for a second term as supervisor.

Jose Berra

A CPA and an attorney who worked in the Office of Tax Policy at the U.S. Department of the Treasury in Washington under Presidents Bush and Clinton, Berra also has extensive finance experience and business experience. He said his broad experience gives him an unusual ability to delve into important, often complicated, details on a host of town issues and also to anticipate future ramifications.

“It’s incredibly personally fulfilling,” Berra said of his previous service and his hope to return to the board. “I can have a significant positive impact in a town I love because of my unique experience and background. At 26 ½ years and counting, I have very consciously made this amazing town my home for most of my adult life.”

One of the key issues facing the town is how to pay for critical road repairs, an issue that has become more urgent with recent difficult winters, finite resources and the need to keep the roads safe. The current board has been working with its finance committee which is helping officials devise a plan to complete repairs as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible.

Berra is a fiscal conservative who supports a responsible, cost-effective amount of borrowing to implement a comprehensive plan that both accelerates road repairs to a three-year period and is shown to lower the overall cost of those repairs. He said safety, cost and quality of life are some of the key factors he would look to balance in devising a plan, and says that those factors make it imperative to complete the work as quickly as possible.

“I think it’s important to move ahead with a comprehensive plan sooner rather than later,” Berra said. “Obviously, it would have been much better if we had done it this year.”

For Berra, an important component must be a schedule that would be posted on the town’s website to inform residents of when they could expect their street to be redone.

Once repairs are made, he said the town must be diligent in maintaining the roads so that they will last as long as possible.

A critical issue facing downtown Armonk and portions of North White Plains is parking. Berra said once the town moves ahead with creating additional spaces behind Hergenhan Recreation Center for use by employees of local businesses to free up spaces closest to the stores and restaurants for patrons, a project he voted for last year, the town should then assess its impact on the downtown to determine what additional parking may be needed in the short and long term. He would not move ahead with additional parking at the more expensive and environmentally challenging Kent Place site that has been proposed by some unless it’s clear that there aren’t better alternatives and only if it’s shown that it makes sense to do so.

During the public hearings on the Brynwood Golf & Country Club and old lumberyard rezonings, Berra was outspoken against granting preferential condominium taxation for those projects, citing fairness as one key concern since those tax breaks would have to be subsidized by the other taxpayers in town. Condominium owners pay taxes at roughly half the rate that applies to the vast majority of the town’s housing, which is taxed at the normal fee simple tax rate. He also said that those tax breaks can unfairly adversely impact the values of existing homes that are condo-like in structure but are taxed at the normal fee simple rate.

However, Berra said he would be open to providing seniors a tax break to keep them in the community.

“We want to retain our seniors because they are an important part of the fabric of our community and also some of our most experienced and dedicated volunteers. Furthermore, if you look at it from an economic perspective, they don’t have kids in schools,” he said.

Berra called the county’s handling of the dilapidated 278-year-old Elijah Miller House in North White Plains “a disgrace.” He said he supports keeping the historic structure in the current location and also could support other locations that have the strong backing of North White Plains’ residents since they are most directly affected by the house’s location. He would fight county attempts to shift costs to the town for the repair or ongoing maintenance of the Miller House.

Stephen D’Angelo

D’Angelo has spent the last four years on the town board but comparing the first and second halves of his tenure thus far has almost been like two separate terms.

On a politically split board for the first two years, there were plenty of public clashes. While the current board has had disagreements, D’Angelo said the current members listen and respect one another.

“The next four years I want to continue what we’ve done,” he said. “I worked hard in two different administrations to get things done.”

Although the town has set aside about $2 million toward road repairs this year, taking advantage of low interest rates by borrowing money to accelerate the work will be needed to bring a large portion of the town’s roads up to an acceptable condition, D’Angelo said. The board is awaiting the final recommendation from its task force to help officials determine how best to accomplish that goal.

“I’d like to be able to pave every road tomorrow but the problem is if you don’t do anything for 10 years, then you have to do it all over again,” said D’Angelo, an Armonk accountant.

It has also been able to do roads in Windmill Farm in conjunction with the water main replacement project.

While parking in downtown Armonk remains an issue, D’Angelo said he doesn’t see it as big a problem as when Armonk Square first opened. The town has made strides in getting employees’ vehicles out of the areas where customers should park. Next year, additional spaces will be created after the approval of the extra parking behind the Hergenhan Recreation Center, which should further ease the downtown crunch, he said.

As the economy has slowly recovered from the debilitating recession of seven or eight years ago, the town has steadily regained its fiscal health, he said. However, there have also been good decisions made. D’Angelo said in the past few years, North Castle has lowered the starting salaries of department heads and new employees in the highway and water and sewer departments.

D’Angelo said he expects a 2016 preliminary budget that is under the tax cap when it is released later this week.

Adding assessables in recent years has also helped the town’s finances, he said. The Bristol assisted living facility and Armonk Square have come on line. Still to be added will be the housing project at the old lumberyard and Brynwood, which D’Angelo became comfortable with after the application was reduced to 73 units, which should have little impact on the schools, and fee simple taxation.

“When this project is done the people of this town will be happy with it, the continued on page 11
see more emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle movement through the hamlets. A big step in that direction would be if the town could develop the Chap Line, a proposed connection that will go from downtown Chappaqua to the area near Chappaqua Crossing.

Driving crowds to downtown Chappaqua, such as with the farmers market and the Art Under the Bridge on Saturdays, has been a big help to the hamlet.

A key for Millwood to realize its potential is its hamlets. The commissioners are considering whether sewer capacity can be increased. Gallagher said the town should remain protective of their neighborhoods. The West End has Teatown and Kitchawan while Millwood offers numerous amenities in a small area, such as a grocery store, a post office, a hardware store, a deli, a restaurant and a jeweler, among other businesses, so the potential for revitalization is there, Makowska said.

The challenge is getting additional sewer capacity, which is a political landmine at the county level. However, advances in technology could provide an alternative solution, she said.

"I think that a cost-benefit analysis might warrant investing in a modern wastewater treatment plant and may actually pay off in terms of increased commercial access, which is an important thing," Makowska said.

Makowska said she would not have supported the decision to move ahead with the comprehensive plan without including Chappaqua Crossing. Downtown Chappaqua faces the hurdle of potentially having to compete with that project and it will be important to learn the full scope of businesses beside Whole Foods and Lifetime Fitness.

"I know that the retail mix is of great concern to people and I don't have an answer for that but I have been thinking about it because it says something," she remarked.

Makowska is concerned that traffic not only on Route 117 but crossing over the Saw Mill and the train tracks will pose safety concerns.

Makowska agreed that the cupola building is a good location for affordable units although like all others on the ballot, she criticized the Conifer project, calling it a poor location. The so-called micro projects, which includes Habitat for Humanity having been approved for purchase last summer to renovate a house on King Street, is another example of integrated affordable housing, she said.

She also would support more workforce housing in town for single people and seniors.

"People have now had two years of what a new administration is like and I think the voters of New Castle are intelligent," Makowska said. "I think they care deeply about their hamlets and I think there is concern about, there's concern that the downtown hamlets are at a tipping point and that it can go better or worse."

Jeremy Saland

The son of a former state senator, Saland, makes his first run for public office. Between the family ties and his own public service, which included seven years as an assistant district attorney under longtime Manhattan D.A. Robert Morgenthau and more than five years as a town prosecutor, Saland is familiar with the public sphere.

However, he said his father's political career end when as a Republican he supported the marriage equality vote.

"You do the things because it's well-thought out, processes are followed, all sides are analyzed and you come to a conclusion," said Saland, 41, now a criminal defense attorney. "If my father could sacrifice his career for that, to make the right decision, which ultimately some people may agree or disagree, there's a lesson on a lesser scale on other issues that it can't be done."

Saland sees this year's town election as a critically important crossroad in the town's history because he views Greenstein as someone who tries to control the board rather than working with his colleagues.

"He is the mouthpiece for Team New Castle and that is why I feel it's extremely important to be involved," he said. "Our town board is not Rob Greenstein. We have four town board members and a supervisor and be continues to be the only voice and the most powerful voice and that is problematic."

Saland said he would not have supported the current iteration of Chappaqua Crossing because of serious concerns about traffic and the impact on property values for the surrounding neighborhoods. A 40,000-square-foot two-story building that is custom made for the fitness center could also turn into an albatross for the town and the developer.

He said he would have preferred a significantly downsized version of the project that had some retail but much less than 120,000 square feet.

Of most concern is the impact on the two existing business hamlets. Saland said while there's only so much control the town government has regarding the types of businesses, he and his running mates are proposing other features for downtown Chappaqua.

First, they support "a destination playground," a new and improved children's play area, which could attract families. He also advocates moving the art center from Hardscrabble Road to downtown. Finally, in the warm weather months there could be an "Evening Under the Stars" at the train station, with outdoor seating, food and other activities.

"No one's going to come here or think about coming here if we don't fix the traffic and make this a physically aesthetically pleasing area," Saland said.

While the proposed streetscape looks good on paper, the town must also give the public reasons to arrive, stay and walk around the downtown, he said.

Saland again criticized Greenstein for campaigning against the Conifer project and spending tens of thousands of dollars in legal expenses, but the town likely will be hosting the project as long as the applicant complies with its conditions for a building permit.

A key issue for Saland is ethics reform and he has charged that this administration manipulates the Code of Ethics, he said.

"I really believe that ethics reform is so essential and is one of the reasons why I'm running," Saland said.
Continued from page E6

recommendations. Town officials have toured other railroad crossings to see how they may be made safer, including building new roadways, he said.

Dipalo said the town is looking to enhance its recreation programs, such as adding additional fields and an indoor pool, but grants and savings would be needed to fund the proposals. The town is also exploring installation of solar panels on town government buildings and adding smart water meters.

Dipalo said the town needed new housing for seniors who want to downsize, but not leave Mount Pleasant.

Having a Democratic opponent this year is healthy for the political process, Dipalo said.

"Some of the stuff we're learning is a little surprising to us," he said of McPartland. "He strikes me as very radical."

Some of his opponent's social media sites are "quite vulgar in some ways," DiPaolo said. "I'm not certain of the agenda," he added.

McPartland has not attended a town board meeting at least since March, DiPaolo said, even though the challenger disputes the statement.

Wayne McPartland

McPartland worked for the New York City Fire Department for 33 years, which he called "the ultimate in public service."

McPartland, who retired two years ago, said he wanted to run for a council seat.

"I've always been interested in politics whether international or local and I decided I want to serve the community," he said.

There has not been a bona fide Democrat town board candidate in two decades, McPartland stated.

"This time it's a real organized effort," he said.

He criticized town officials for being too closely allied with Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino, a town resident. County government is wrong to borrow to pay for annual expenses and Astorino too often antagonizes the Department of Housing and Urban Development over the affordable housing settlement, McPartland said.

During his campaign and a recent fundraiser, McPartland said residents have told him they are happy the Republicans have a challenger.

McPartland said he does not agree with a property tax cap, which has been difficult to meet during the current period of low inflation.

"One of the reasons I'm running is to have transparency and openness," McPartland said. "It's like a bit of a closed group over there. "We're not getting the information we should get."

He criticized some of the reductions in town staff, which makes it difficult to make road repairs, he said.

McPartland, 64, said he would advocate for a stop sign on Columbus Avenue, where a woman was killed in September attempting to cross the road.

McPartland said the Republicans attempted to knock him off the ballot even though he easily had enough signatures. However, he said is willing to work with the board's Republicans.

"Some Republicans have been my biggest supporters," McPartland claimed, saying some are impressed with his knowledge of safety-related issues. For example, he has seen fire hydrants buried from sight because of vegetation.

McPartland said the town could increase its use of shared services with neighboring communities, including Briarcliff and Sleepy Hollow.

Mark Rubeo

Rubeo, 44, was appointed to the town board in February 2010 when Maybury replaced Robert Meehan as supervisor. Meehan became county attorney under Astorino.

Rubeo said he was running for re-election to continue helping town residents.

"My parents taught me at a very early age the importance of serving the community, however you can," he said.

Rubeo, an attorney who lives and practices in Hawthorne, has been involved as a coach and league administrator for the town's American Youth Soccer Organization. He has been involved with several other community efforts, including the Mount Pleasant Education Foundation and is on the board of directors of the local chamber of commerce, the board of a local ambulance corps and a member of the Rotary Club.

"We have some projects that we're working on that I want to see through to the end," Rubeo said.

In the area of town finances, Rubeo said the town has an obligation to find ways to maintain a high level of service, but maintain or even reduce costs.

He said the town has been working on downtown revitalization, which has been in the offing for years. The idea is have residents spend their money in Mount Pleasant, which benefits the town, including generating additional sales tax revenue, he said.

The town is eyeing state funds to help remake the hamlets, he said, hoping to make the downtowns more attractive for pedestrians and small businesses.

There is a need to broaden Mount Pleasant's commercial tax base in hopes of spreading the tax burden so it doesn't fall on residents' shoulders, he said.

The town has also used its Industrial Development Agency to attract new entities to Mount Pleasant, including Regeneron and EF Academy, Rubeo said.

In recent years, officials have helped extricate Mount Pleasant from a "fiscal stress" designation by the state comptroller's office and have increased its reserves by millions of dollars, Rubeo said.

He said he supports increasing the use of shared services. One example is having a private entity deal with yard waste, he said. Mount Pleasant's highway department has been renting and sharing equipment with North Castle and Pleasantville, he added.

Rubeo said the town has adequate affordable housing, including new apartments, and with new zoning, residential units could be added to the second floor of downtown businesses.

Not having a Democrat elected to the town board for several years is "a reflection on the job that our town government has done over the past several decades," said Rubeo who also works in his family's business, Berger Hardware, in Hawthorne.

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people in Windmill will be very happy with it and this is going to be a shining star for North Castle," D’Angelo said of Brynwood.

He said the board has been vigilant that North White Plains and its residents continue to be treated equally. Recently, officials went with state Sen. George Latimer on a tour of the Route 22 corridor at rush hour in hopes of addressing traffic issues and Councilwoman Barbara DiGiacinto has regularly hosted her Saturday morning meetings. Adding a generator to the community center and library on Clove Road is a priority to make that facility a town board achieve that goal.

One of the biggest issues facing the town is the need to repave much of the town’s 92 miles of road. Mezzancello said he wants the town to complete the work as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible, and as a contractor, he believes his professional experience can help the town board achieve that goal.

“I want to get the roads done in the quickest amount of time not just to be but to enjoy it the most,” Mezzancello said. “If the money’s the same, if it doesn’t cost you more for three years or five years, why not do it in three years?”

Although parking in downtown Armonk is a problem at certain hours, Mezzancello said that it’s a nice problem to have. While campaigning recently near Armonk Square, about 70 percent of shoppers that he interacted with weren’t town residents, he said.

Expansion of the Hergenhan Recreation Center parking should relieve some pressure. If additional space is needed, Mezzancello said he would like to explore the idea of building “a low-profile” parking structure in the area behind the Main Street stores.

Similar to his colleagues, Mezzancello supported the Brynwood rezoning, but having fee simple taxes on the 73 residences was a must. He also complimented the Brynwood Partners for working with the town on a host of other complicated issues compared to the wide range of issues the town board addresses.

“Mezzancello said that it’s a nice problem that worked out really well. “The reality is I just want to keep everything going the way it is, just make the town better,” he said. “Brynwood, try to get that going and all of these other projects we’ve approved over the last couple of years. We don’t want to tax the people too much but we want to do things.”

Guy Mezzancello

Mezzancello, a former planning board member, thought he was kept busy reviewing applications. That was easy compared to the wide range of issues the town board addresses.

“The town board is a lot more work,” he said. “I like it. I can get a lot more done, I think. I’ve done a lot. I think we have a lot more to go, but it’s been challenging, very challenging.”

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“Mezzancello said that it’s a nice problem to have that worked out really well.”

While Mezzancello agreed that Brynwood's luxury units should be subject to full taxation, he would like to have a greater mix of housing stock and types of taxes in town.

“There’s a place for condos, there’s a place for townhouses, there’s a place for fee simple taxation,” he said. “Brynwood definitely should be full taxation.”

Enticing appropriate types of businesses to North Castle to generate more revenue is critical. Mezzancello applauded the move that is bringing a satellite location of White Plains Hospital to Business Park Drive. He said another type of business that could fit well in one of the vacancies there is a data center, which would be a relatively low cost to the town but would provide revenue benefits.

Mezzancello said he would like to help North White Plains by trying to find a way for commercial property owners to restore their properties along Route 22. One of the hamlet's challenges stems from the traffic and the need for the state to improve conditions along that state route.