

2013 Sustainable Saratoga Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE NAME: Joanne Yepsen

CANDIDATE FOR (OFFICE): Mayor, Saratoga Springs

QUESTION #1: Please briefly define “sustainability” and what it means to you.

Sustainability is the continuing process of trying to establish a compatible relationship between humankind and the natural and physical environment of our Earth. And, it means an economic and environmental self-sufficiency.

Actions towards achieving sustainability on an individual or small business or corporate level, municipal or State or federal level are as diverse as changing the light bulbs in your house, improving fuel efficiency for transportation through car pooling and mass-transit, and improving the energy efficiency of your home, to the street tree and solar projects of Sustainable Saratoga in partnership with the City, to taking all possible steps towards establishing a pedestrian-bike friendly city. (If NYC can do it we can do it.)

As individuals, businesses-persons and local officials we have been doing some of this, but these are first steps and are part of an evolving scenario. The Comprehensive Plan should point the way in such matters, including through development of a sustainability element of that plan.

QUESTION #2: Many businesses, institutions and municipalities have designated sustainability coordinators. Do you support the creation of a sustainability coordinator or office in city hall or in the county government?

Yes. It is time for our City to assign these responsibilities within City Hall and to incorporate sustainability practices in City business and planning. This could also be quite useful at the County level where much could be done through the countywide reach, including working with the towns and villages in such matters in an educational and technical assistance capacity. The Cooperative Extension is doing some of this work already and the City and County should coordinate their efforts with them. The City, has done a lot already, working in part through its existing staff and consultants, such as Johnson Controls, particularly in relation to buildings and grounds, but as Mayor, I will take a more pro-active approach, working with advisory committees and organizations such as Downtown Business, Chamber of Commerce, NGOs and service clubs such as Rotary International, Sustainable Saratoga, and statewide agencies and organizations such as the NYS Energy Office, Environmental Advocates, the NY League of Conservation Voters, the NYS Conference of Mayors and Other Local Officials and others. As Mayor, I plan to start a series of educational workshops for builders and architects in the community. The Mayor’s department also should be utilizing planning staff & experts in the community to prepare a Sustainability Plan, as an element of the Comprehensive Plan in the same way that the 2002 adopted Open Space Plan is an element.

QUESTION #3: What can we do locally to confront climate change?

This is a critical piece of any sustainability program. We need to try to slow it down (too late to stop it now; its like turning around a tanker) by reducing our carbon footprint individually and through our businesses, corporate entities and industries, as much as possible. With my urging, and help from Sustainable Saratoga, we've gotten the City to commit to the US Conference of Mayors' Cool Cities and the NYS Climate Smart Communities. We have been looking at hybrid vehicles, lighting and flaring the remaining methane on the landfill.

The State has a plan for climate change that provides a framework of ideas. We need to learn from each other and exchange ideas and technology. The City Government should be taking the lead as a role model to do more with energy conservation, by reducing dependence on fossil fuels (particularly by switching to solar and hydrogen), by improving carbon sequestration as we are doing with our new urban forest/street tree program. The solar project on the landfill is an exciting initiative that I fully support. My connections at the local, State and federal levels in partnership with Sustainable Saratoga will help further Saratoga Springs' efforts. We must do what we can to be proactive, otherwise sustainability for Saratoga Springs, and everywhere else, will be an elusive, if not unachievable goal.

QUESTION #4: What are some of your ideas for sustainable economic development for our community? Do they include casino gambling?

Serious sustainable economic development requires producing good-paying permanent jobs that will support working families that will be the backbone of the community. That means that we should court manufacturing jobs, such as those at Quad Graphics and Ball Container or with the financial services or insurance sector, such as Ayco or State Farm. The racing industry is an important part of that mix which, with museums, history and health (mineral springs) and the State park, lends character and interest that support tourism and recreation as an important part of our economy. Retail shops and restaurants will thrive on a base that provides a good mix of jobs and income levels in the city.

Adding card and wheel games to the existing Racino with its VLTs will bring in specialists in the gambling business for that purpose and provide additional supplementary jobs for maintenance, food services, etc. I don't personally support gambling and don't see it as doing much to improve our economic base although casino clientele, as with Racino clientele generally, will make some favorable impact on downtown in restaurants and hotels. The estimated expansion of the Racino will produce 200 new jobs. However, this activity will also require extra police and emergency services that the legislation proposes to cover by additional State funding, over and above what has been provided (so far) for VLT impacts.

QUESTION #5: How do you envision the future development of land within the city's core and within the "greenbelt?"

I envision that it will be consistent with our adopted City-in-the-Country vision for development of the city. It means having a densely developed urban core, with sharp

edges (to contain ugly and inefficient urban sprawl) and a surrounding area that retains rural character. This vision has been set off in a box on the first page of the Comprehensive Plan since 2001. The concept also was formalized in the 1996 and 2002 (revised) Open Space Plans, both adopted unanimously by the City Council. It is backed up by the low-density one-acre lot size (RR-1) of our zoning ordinance, adopted in 2003 with our Conservation Design subdivision regulations which save 50% or more of the important open space on large parcels by clustering the overall density allowance for the whole parcel on the other 50%.

These tools are an important counterpart to the detailed density and architectural review controls that are in place in the zoning ordinance for downtown development and redevelopment, including infill. The City's Planning Board, Design Review Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meet quarterly to be sure that their programs are coordinated.

If elected, I will re-establish the Open Space Committee (that has not met in six years) and the important Charter-required position of Administrator of Parks, Open Land and Historic Preservation to make sure that there is fulltime attention and staff resources to focus on City responsibility for open land acquisition, parks planning and management and preservation of important historic areas, sites and features, working in close cooperation with our land use boards and interested citizen groups and NGOs. Protection of the "greenbelt" aka the Country part of the City-in-the-Country would be an important duty. This person has responsibility for obtaining State, federal and County grants for these projects, and for fully establishing and administering the City's permanent Environmental Protection Program, created by local law in 2001 in conjunction with the \$5.0m. Land Preservation Bond Act. Advising on use of the City's Recreation Fund for land acquisition projects and facilities development is included in these duties. The Administrator, carrying out other duties listed in the Charter, will also provide support for the City's permanently established Open Lands Advisory Committee, which I will reactivate.

Through improvements in the transparency and accountability of the Mayor's Office I will encourage greater citizen involvement in decision-making for development throughout the urban core and in the "greenbelt." I will change the tone of our local government and make it user-friendlier.

QUESTION #6: If elected, what kinds of sustainable activities or projects would you likely retain? How could they be improved? Which ones would you initiate?

1): ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION:

-- Complete streets will become more than just checklists and a committee. We will begin strengthening and implementing the policy for safety of our walkers and bikers.

-- As Mayor, we will work with property owners, commercial developers and local leaders to develop a master plan for connecting trails, urban parks and neighborhoods. With my federal and state contacts we will have many connections to outside funding that we will be diligent about applying for.

-- Eventually we will be at the saturation point, especially in the core of our City, for the number of cars we can accommodate, even with one more parking garage built. We must make the downtown experience pleasant and encourage as many people to shop, dine, and take advantage of our new movie theater. We need to look at a possible shuttle even if just seasonal to take people regularly from designated parking lots to our wonderful diverse assets our City has to offer.

2) ENERGY EFFICIENCIES:

-- Investigate further and expand energy saving measures for the City through energy performance initiatives and contracting similar to previous contract with Johnson Controls.

-- Each Council member will be asked to appoint a member to the Climate Smart Communities Task Force so we have regular representation and collaboration.

-- Sponsor workshops for architects, builders and property owners on green initiatives.

-- Use base line information collected through the inventory to plan our future vehicle fleets, our ice-skating rink operations, and lighting. City should be a progressive role model for all of our citizens and other cities around the state.

3) JOBS/SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY:

-- Create an effort to attract young professionals to live and work here with housing options they can afford, creating Saratoga as an entrepreneurial hub and encouraging VCs to invest in start ups in Saratoga. Life style they are looking for is one without a car. We need to continue to explore shuttle services, work with CDTA and create safe bike and walking lanes using curbing wherever our infrastructure allows.

-- I will have a big banner across City Hall that we are Open for Business once elected Mayor. All developers, residents, small businesses will have a voice at my table and will be heard and all good ideas will be entertained to keep our business local and create more jobs.

-- Agriculture is the number one industry in Saratoga County. There is discussion regarding the creation of an agriculture-training center in Saratoga Springs and I am fully behind trying to make that happen. We can work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and our Award Winning Farmers market to hold workshops and offer community gardens. Many young people are interested in farming as a career. We also must promote healthy living by connecting additional farm to table opportunities.

-- Tourism is the second largest industry and should be fostered. The City needs to be a more active player by supporting the Chamber, Convention and Tourism Bureau, City Center, and SEDC. I will be a Mayor who leads by vision and new initiatives to make our local economy stronger and more sustainable and by representing Saratoga Springs proudly outside the City to garner even stronger regional relationships and more outside funding from the State.

