

Doug Foster, Candidate for Nyack Village Trustee
May 2009 Q&A with the Nyack Democratic Committee

Q: There is a concern that Nyack's infrastructure, including sidewalks, is deteriorating. If you agree that this is a concern, how would you find money to deal with this concern?

I do agree that the apparent condition of Nyack's infrastructure is worrisome, and there appears to be a high degree of "deferred maintenance". A top issue for me if I am to be Trustee is to institute proper management practices. For infrastructure, Nyack should have a capital plan. The base of such a plan will be a long-term analysis of roads, sidewalks, utilities and other infrastructure (like street trees).

Armed with the resulting information, a budget and calendar would be created to maintain Nyack's assets. Major infrastructure expenses, which have long-term benefits, should be bonded. The key is to base decisions off of a clear plan so the process is based on good information and a long-term viewpoint

Q: What specific blocks or neighborhoods should be a priority in terms of improvement and how would you undertake these improvements?

I see three types of improvements the Village needs to manage: basic infrastructure, commercial zones, and parks. As I stated in the previous question, decisions on infrastructure improvements should only be made after a Village-wide analysis is conducted which can then lead to the capital plan that would specify which improvements get priority.

I believe Nyack needs to give the commercial zones more attention. Our downtown business district needs a major improvement; it is an asset with huge potential returns since it generates so much economic and cultural activity. Think of the downtown as an outdoor mall. The public areas are haggard and unappealing, and need a "face lift" to become a place that attracts people as a place to come spend time and money.

The downtown serves a much larger area than the Village proper, and the Village should only pay a portion of the costs. The rest of the costs should be shouldered by a combination of federal, state, county and town sources. I believe the Village should invest in the next phase of the Main Street improvements. It would be unfortunate to lose the HUD money dedicated to the project. The Village should pay for the engineering work and use the current HUD commitment as leverage for further funding.

Nyack's parks, particularly Memorial Park, is another key community asset which, like the downtown, serves a greater area than the Village proper. The Village has been lucky to have an active Parks Conservancy, and frankly, Jen White. The Conservancy

(volunteer residents) has been able to raise significant money and develop a fabulous plan. The Village can not afford to shoulder the park improvements, and so getting funding is essential. The plan and connections the Conservancy has built will serve as a base to leverage further dollars. Nyack's waterfront is its primary natural asset that differentiates us from most communities. Along with our built environment (traditional, walkable downtown), it's a killer combination.

The bottom line is that Nyack has great resources and we need to be creative to leverage them to make improvements so that we can have a beautiful downtown, waterfront and a solid budget so we can keep taxes affordable and afford to pursue our other goals.

Q: Should parking permits be issued to residents to allow them exclusive parking on their street during certain hours?

On-street parking should be looked at as part of a larger transportation system. Finding places for parking cars in downtowns (which are multi-modal) is probably the biggest challenge in modern planning. The bottom line is that cars take a huge amount of space and that translates to the fact that parking is extremely expensive, particularly structured parking.

Residents have different needs than employees or visitors. All these needs must be looked at holistically to find the most efficient allocation of precious resources (space). Residents that live adjacent to large parking generators are heavily impacted because they can't find parking on their own street. For those older areas where there isn't off-street parking, it makes it very difficult.

Resident parking passes are an excellent way to manage on-street parking in residential areas that also are used heavily by visitors and/or commuters. Such a program requires a member item in Albany, but the neighborhoods adjacent to downtown and the hospital would be good candidates for such a program. One concern is that a lead staff person needs to shepherd the process. If there is sufficient momentum for such a program, and we can find staff resources, it is worth pursuing.

Q: Which parts of the proposed Riverspace project do you view positively? Negatively? Why?

I think the vision of redeveloping the "superblock" is long overdue. Like thousands of downtowns throughout this country, the "superblock" is a sad result of a misguided "urban renewal" policy from 40 years ago, which was dealing with difficult problems of the time.

The block is severely underutilized. It should be a mixed use, traditionally designed development, and having the arts as an anchor would be wonderful. Riverspace has

done a good job creating the overall vision and are the only ones seriously considering such a project. For that reason, the Village should work with Riverspace to craft a plan for the block's redevelopment.

To be clear, this project is a community project, and the Village Board needs to take ownership of the process.

Q: How would you tighten the village budget?

One of my primary areas of focus will be to set up management processes so elected officials and staff executives can make effective decisions. The most effective way of "tightening" the budget is to make procedural improvements, so that decisions will be strategic and allow for re-engineering departments. It's better to focus on becoming more efficient, rather than just taking resources away from an inefficient system.

I believe the Board should set up a Budget&Administration and a Planning&Development committee, each to have their own chairs and agendas. This will institutionalize a more rational management process for the Board. You can read more at an article I wrote at <http://nyackfirst.org/2009/05/rethinking-village-board-meetings>.

Q: How would you attract new businesses to downtown specifically, and Nyack in general?

Obviously, making the Main Street improvements, as I have stated above, would help attract people to our downtown, and thus more profitable for stores. There is no better way to attract businesses than increase the number of people on the streets. Retail businesses were not rushing to locate in the Southeast part of downtown Manhattan, until Southstreet Seaport was built. After those public improvements, there is not difficulty finding businesses to fill storefronts. It is the Village's responsibility to invest in the public areas to provide a safe and beautiful environment for people to come and shop.

Nyack's small budget and lack of professional staff limits what it can do to develop a marketing plan for its downtown. What is often done is to create a Business Improvement District (BID), which would hire staff to market the commercial district. But funding for this is derived from the property owners within the business district in the form of an additional tax, which would be yet another burden on Nyack's businesses, the last thing they need at this point.

One thing the Village can do is facilitate the process for businesses to renovate their store, without losing their grandfather rights to the use, and impose parking requirements. My understanding is that the proposed zoning ordinance will address many of these issues. I need to understand the details more, but moving ahead and passing the new ordinance would be a priority.

Q: Should Nyack make it a priority to have a publically funded community center? If so, where would funds come from and if not, what are some alternatives?

The Village simply can not afford to build a new building and staff a new program. Given the small tax base and myriad of deferred maintenance and other priorities, the Village should not jump into funding a new community center.

That said, I think having programs to support our youth and provide an environment for recreation, learning and community building is essential. There are a lot of existing resources available (school, churches, Nyack Center, library, YMCA, etc.), but little coordination among the resources already in existence.

My overall theme is better management. There are a lot of resources already invested in programs with similar goals of a community center. A better place to start would be to set up a community board comprised of each of the major stakeholders and use a holistic approach, aligning the existing programs to improve services. Once this is done, needed additional resources can be obtained, and hopefully the Village would not be the sole funder.

Q: How should the village government balance the needs of its residents and its business owners when their interests do not coincide?

Balancing the needs between residents and business owners is like any other issue, in that it is best handled with good management, an open and fair process, and a civic spirit. Here are some ways in which I would want to ensure a productive and positive process to balance between constituents:

- Information dissemination – people need to know what the issues are and what is going on. There are several ways to improve the process of getting the word out:
 - Make information readily available to people through www.nyack.org, which should be regularly updated with current information and issues.
 - Set up televised meetings. I've already talked with Suzanne Barclay about this, and the Town would be willing to share its equipment they have with Verizon and Cablevision.
 - Set up podcasts of the meetings
- Public comment – Board and other public meetings should be regulated to limit discussion by each public member and to demand a level of civility. This will allow more people to participate, and ensure people that they will not be the recipient of personal attacks at public meetings.

Ultimately, it should be emphasized that Nyack needs a vibrant and successful commercial core. The downtown is key to Nyack for its identity, lifestyle and economic future. An attitude of mutual respect and celebration of our diversity must be at the

core of any discussion between groups within our community.

Q: Please include anything else you wish the committee to know.

If you want more information about me, you can find it on Jen White's and my website <http://nyackfirst.org/doug-foster>. Jen and I are running together on the same platform, which we are still in the process of developing. You can read about the platform on our website.