

Jen White, Candidate for Nyack Village Trustee
May 2009 Q&A with the Nyack Democratic Committee

Q: Would you include money in the budget to repair the deplorable, dangerous sidewalks on Nyack's residential streets?

I think it was folly for the Village to eliminate any program in which an expense that should normally be provided by the Village government is split between homeowners and the Village. That said, I don't believe that the system ever worked in Nyack as is apparent in the sad state of many of our streets, something that cannot be attributed to economic down turn. It is important that the health of any community be reflected in the way it looks to those visiting and living there. I think the sidewalks need to be repaired. How to fund such a thing is not clear to me yet. I will repeat the refrain throughout this questionnaire that we must find alternative ways of funding necessities and luxuries in this community. In my time raising money for Memorial Park, I have discovered many alternatives to taxes and punitive fines or general parking fees. That said, I think that infrastructure and aesthetic repairs should be high on the list of things the Village spends, or raises money for and on.

Q: How could the following block in Nyack be improved so as to blend in more with the rest of the downtown - the block on the south side Main Street between the Riverspace Theater and the Korean War memorial Park?

I am familiar with the carefully developed Streetscape Plan for the downtown and think that it is a good one. I have spoken to those organizing it about wrapping their fundraising efforts into those already underway for the waterfront. The two are not exclusive of each other and the Village should be seeking a cohesiveness that makes the waterfront a natural extension of the center of our community. This applies to the Village as a whole. The Korean War memorial Park was a well-intentioned beginning and an improvement over what was previously there. That said, it needs the thoughtful eye of a talented landscape architect and a substantial increase in the amount of planting and greenery. As it is now, it is merely a walk through space full of hard surfaces and unfriendly hard to utilize areas. This may be an unnecessary discussion depending on the future development of the Superblock.

Q: How do you feel about issuing parking permits to residents on residential streets? In other words, on a residential block only people who live on the block would have permission to park on that block at night after a certain hour and they would display a residential parking permit in their windshield or on their bumper.

The parking permit question is an intriguing one. I am not sure that, should the Village decide to go ahead, it needs to be limited to residential streets. Certainly a nighttime residential permit is a great way to raise revenue, even if

the fee is nominal, help homeowners and, if properly organized, not interfere with garbage pick up or routine maintenance by the Village. I am curious and researching the possibility of extending the range of such a permit to all parking in the Village and purchasable ONLY by Village residents and on a per car basis. It troubles me that our Village serves as the downtown for a number of communities and we bear the tax burden but have very little reward for our financial contributions. Perhaps, if an effective way to establish such a program can be found, this could generate revenue (permits would be sold only to Village residents) but also a reward to residents for their tax contributions.

Q: Obviously the important question is position on Riverspace? If against the concept -why, and if for the project how would you manage it so it doesn't overwhelm the village?

I think that the Riverspace proposal is fascinating and potentially exciting. The Master Plan makes it very clear that the "Superblock", or the most important piece of real estate in our downtown, is severely underutilized. It's also tremendously unattractive. The Riverspace team has come forward with a concept that is not only appealing from a business generating position but would aesthetically improve the downtown substantially. I approve wholeheartedly of the process that has been set forth by the Mayor and the Village Board. We need to examine whether this is something we want, which, according to the Master Plan, seems to be the case. We then need to establish exactly what we want there. I love the idea of an art center and am curious, once numbers have been assessed, if it is a viable core business for our downtown. I'm optimistic that it is. That said, I have always maintained that whatever happens there need not be Riverspace, per se. It can be the dream of any developer who has an idea for that block. The people behind Riverspace are visionaries and I suspect no one else will come forward to challenge their image with an alternative vision. I think the Village needs to stay open to the possibilities reflected in the Riverspace vision while maintaining a tight grip on elements such as scope, scale, tax abatements and the actual content of the development. That said, we shouldn't kill something as potentially as exciting as this, particularly when Chuck Schumer and Elliot Engel and many others have pledged their financial support. It could, if done properly, do magical things to our wonderful community.

Q: How would they tighten the village budget? Are there places where expenses could and would be cut?

The biggest problem I see in our Village budget is the revenue stream. I think we need to focus on alternative areas for a number of big budget items. I believe, for instance, that with guidance, the Nyack Center, a key to the well being of Nyack's lower income families, can raise it's operating budget from a more aggressive fundraising effort at the state and federal level and reduce it's dependence on the Village. I am confident that some shifts in the structure and workload of the DPW can trim some substantial budget items. We need to

examine ways to join forces with other municipalities to lower costs on items and services that might be better shared, both from a community standpoint and a greener world position. I think we need to increase grant writing for things like the Streetscape plan and carefully monitor hours of work. Economic development needs to be encouraged and smart development or growth, thus an increase in property tax revenues, encouraged.

Q: How could we as village attract new business to the downtown?

There needs to be an aggressive approach to economic development. Zoning codes and Planning issues need to be re-examined to assess whether they make our Village a friendly place for a business or building owner. Members of the Village Board and the Mayor need to establish a process by which new business owners are encouraged to come to Nyack and set up business. Parking needs to be examined because many merchants believe that it is a determining factor in their success.

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?

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

The entire Village needs to be a priority. The downtown is important but so is the waterfront. Each neighborhood has its needs, whether it's trees or availability of recreational activity. We are not a very "green" community and we need to look long and hard at how to improve our contribution as a community to that ideal. I have itemized above how I would deal with some of these issues.

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

The Village of Nyack has long had a vocal collection of residents who would like to have a community center. They range from residents of Nyack Plaza to the director of the Nyack Center. There is currently a dearth of opportunities for indoor recreation for kids involved in programs at the Nyack Center as well as residents of the community who cannot afford to join the YMCA. I have examined a number of options including access to the High School and elementary schools in the area. The insurance costs and concerns that the Superintendent has seem to make this a prohibitive option. I think the Village needs to look long and hard at how a community center would work here, perhaps going so far as to order needs assessment. Once a determination is made that a Community Center is a need, we as a community should make

sure that it is more than a gym for kids to hang out in. I have dreamed of having a building that is financed by developers looking to build in the Village in exchange for a reduction in their affordable housing requirement. The building would be a green, innovative place, ground breaking in its design and concept. Perhaps a community garden could be housed on the roof. The new community center would house all of the Nyack Centers programs as well as create indoor recreational opportunities for kids. More importantly, it should be a center for the entire community, one that includes cooking classes and exercise programming and all sorts of educational opportunities. I think it would be great if all of those business's who exist in Nyack off the tax rolls, the Not For Profits who's percentage is a staggering...% would be asked to contribute some programming. For instance, Nyack Hospital could provide prenatal care or well child care or prostate cancer screening, on a limited basis, in lieu of the enormous tax write off they currently take. I think the community center should not be financed by taxpayers or bonding but by barter and grant writing. This, of course, would all come after a needs assessment.

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

Ultimately, all of our needs are the same. We want a healthy, thriving community that is as wonderful to live in, as it is to visit. I think if that is kept in mind than the answers will become clear. One of the biggest issues in Nyack is that information is often spotty and communication between groups of interested parties doesn't happen often enough. The Village Board needs to encourage community participation in meetings and in the process of addressing concerns by being more open, by publicizing upcoming issue based meetings, by keeping the website up to date and perhaps even televising or creating online access to public meetings. The more people understand about the process and the other parties concerns, the more likely we will be in reaching a satisfying conclusion.