

Thank you for the opportunity to answer the questions submitted by the Executive Committee of our Nyack Democratic Committee. If you have any questions, comments, constructive criticisms, etc. after reading this, please feel free to call me at 353-1935 or email me at richard77@optonline.net

1. ***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 share this concern. Sidewalk repair is an important and popular program that many villagers have counted on for many years. Unfortunately, the recently passed 2009 – 2010 budget (which I voted against) eliminated all funding for sidewalk repair and the Board did not accept my proposal to restore half of the prior amount of \$35,000 a year. We can find the money for sidewalk repairs through a combination of increasing revenue from fees, fines, ratables, and government aid and decreasing our expenses by improving efficiencies, restricting overtime, salary freezes, eliminating wasteful spending, selling little-used equipment, and not re-filling non-essential vacancies. The Board has taken some of these steps already.
2. ***What specific blocks or neighborhoods should be a priority in terms of improvement and how would you undertake these improvements?*** I agree with the Streetscape Committee that Main St. between Franklin St. and Broadway should be the first priority in terms of improvement. We should begin the design work and undertake the actual improvements when the village has eliminated its parking-related deficit, regained its financial footing, and determined how the bonding costs will be covered without raising taxes. As a second priority, we need to continue to move forward on the Memorial Park improvement program as initiated by the Nyack Park Conservancy. Memorial Park is the “lungs” of our village and brings together more villagers than does any other place in Nyack.
3. ***Should parking permits be issued to residents to allow them exclusive parking on their street during certain hours?*** I'm not sure that residents should have the “exclusive parking” rights on their streets during certain hours but I do support the idea of parking permits. I need to study this question in more depth and would like to speak further with whichever Committee member asked it.
4. ***Which parts of the proposed Riverspace project do you view positively? Negatively? Why?*** The arts are an integral part of Nyack's identity as a village. Residents and businesses alike benefit with Nyack as the arts capital of Rockland County, and the philanthropists and workers who have kept Riverspace afloat for the past three years are genuine heroes. As for me, the arts were a vital part of my life even before I attended my first performance at the old Metropolitan Opera at age 7. Leonard Bernstein was a personal mentor of mine and the Nyack Library honored me as its first-ever volunteer of the year for the music programs I offered there. I travel often to Westchester and Manhattan to see movies that I would much rather see at Riverspace. I have supported Riverspace as a supporter/donor for the last two years and was instrumental (pardon the pun) in bringing the Rockland Symphony Orchestra to Riverspace for the first time.

Riverspace presented its proposal about two years ago. Since then I've attended many Riverspace meetings, thought about Riverspace for countless hours, discussed its pros and cons with dozens of residents, merchants, and visitors, and compared its current proposal with our Comprehensive Master Plan. Here is some of the positive and negative feedback that I've received about the current Riverspace proposal:

- It improves and enhances Nyack's arts and educational opportunities;
- It adds a mix of affordable and market level housing to our downtown;
- It provides a village green much larger than Veterans Park;
- It restores an attractive streetscape to Main St. between Franklin St. and Cedar St.;
- It connects Main St. with Depew Avenue, thus improving Nyack's walkability;
- It calls for the demolition of “the ugliest building in Nyack” (Bill Irwin's words);
- It has large potential for private economic development, job creation, and increasing property values.
- The buildings themselves would be “green,” this is an unbelievably visionary idea. I believe that Nyack should enact green building codes as Orangetown, Clarkstown, and Ramapo have done.

- The four-floor, above-ground parking garage would be harmful to the residents in the surrounding buildings in terms of air quality, noise, views, and quality of life. Our Comprehensive Master Plan calls for small-scale, at-grade, decentralized solutions to downtown parking instead of a garage.
- What would be the impact on our taxes of building, operating, and maintaining the garage?
- The size, scale, and density of the project seems incompatible with the size, scale, and density of the rest of our downtown, as called for in the CMP. One resident recently told me: “it’s just too big.” “Scale it back,” a business owner just told me, “it doesn’t fit.”
- Would the Riverspace funding model create more competition for merchants who are already hurting?
- The additional traffic and congestion in our downtown would degrade our air quality;
- The downside of increasing property values is the potential for downtown rents to increase (gentrification);
- How would the potential costs for additional sidewalks, sewers, lighting, police, DPW, and fire protection impact our taxes?
- Riverspace has described its proposal as “revenue neutral” to Nyack, i.e. while significant private economic growth would be stimulated, it wouldn’t do much for the village’s tax base of ratables.
- Additional concerns: Riverspace hasn’t yet demonstrated that a project of this size would be economically feasible. As Jan Degenshein wrote: “the flip side of ‘if you build it they will come’ is ‘what if they gave a party and nobody showed up.’” Also, is it in our interests for the village grant private development rights to four acres of prime public real estate in the heart of our downtown? How would Riverspace pay for the land? If in cash, how much? If not in cash, what kind of “in-kind considerations” would the village receive?

The Riverspace project will have profound cultural, economic, social, and environmental impacts on Nyack. It is essential for Nyack and Riverspace to find common ground and to reach an honorable compromise that is respectful to all, consistent with our Master Plan, and in the best interests of our entire village. I look forward to continuing my dialogue with Riverspace and with all the groups of our community on this project.

5. ***How would you tighten the village budget?*** I voted against the \$5 million budget the Board recently adopted because it included Nyack’s highest tax increase in more than 15 years (9.49%). This, I believe, was just too much when so many people are struggling in so many ways and are being squeezed so much by so many different taxing entities. Ironically, the budget decreased services as it increased taxes.

The most effective and important way to tighten the village budget long-term is to move away from “incremental budgeting” and towards “zero-based budgeting,” which requires each and every budgetary line-item to be justified from the basis of zero, not merely from what was spent the year before. In the meantime, the best ways for the village budget to be tightened without raising taxes are by decreasing expenses (improving our efficiencies; restricting overtime, negotiating a less costly health plan with larger employee contributions, not re-filling non-essential vacancies)) and increasing revenues from higher fees, fines, government grants and additional ratables. I would also consult with and learn from mayors from nearby, similarly-sized communities such as Piermont, which recently passed a budget with a tax increase of less than .4%.

6. ***How would you attract new businesses to downtown specifically, and Nyack in general?*** Here are a few ideas that were suggested to me by one of Nyack’s most innovative and creative business owners: allow B&B’s to encourage stayovers, thereby making Nyack a destination; a pro-active Chamber of Commerce that promotes and markets Nyack to tourism centers by developing brochures for display racks at popular destinations in the metropolitan New York City area; bring more ratables to the village from outside the downtown but within the village; more and better arts offerings; a true village green in the heart of downtown; implementing the Streetscape Plan; an active waterfront with boat rentals, kayaks, a fishing pier, and bike rentals; “user-friendly” parking enforcement; and lower rents from landlords.
7. ***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?*** Several of the most important questions regarding a publicly funded community center include: Where would it go? What would it cost to build, operate, and maintain? But perhaps the most basic questions are: Do we need a publicly funded community center and what do we want it to do? I believe that the first step towards answering these questions should be a “needs

assessment,” the village would determine exactly what it’s looking for in a community center, compare these needs with what our contract agencies (the Nyack Center, YMCA, and others) and others in the village are currently offering, and then decide whether our unmet needs are important enough to justify the expense of a building, operating, and maintaining a new center and the cost of buying the land.

Spring Valley and Haverstraw built, run, and maintain their community centers with a combination of Community Development Block Grants and tax revenues. A similar model could be applied to Nyack, but first we need to determine if we need such a center. Meanwhile, I’m glad to serve as the Board’s liaison to the Nyack Center and I’m sure that our entire Board will continue to support our contract agencies.

8. ***How should the village government balance the needs of its residents and its business owners when their interests do not coincide?*** It’s village government’s job to make decisions in the best interests of the *entire* village, not just one group or another. I know that the entire board will work as hard as we can to prevent “zero-sum” type of situations where one group gains at the other’s expense. If attempts at consensus have failed and competing interests can’t be reconciled, I’ll keep an open mind, weigh the facts of the issue, and cast my vote based on the best interests of the entire village.

What specific skills do you possess that will strengthen your ability to be mayor? I believe that the best government is the most open government. We need to make it easier for citizens to participate in or view our meetings – improving our website, putting the meetings on cable television or streaming them live over the internet, and continuing to conduct meetings in different locations throughout the village are good ideas.

Although the statutory powers of the Mayor are rather limited, it’s up to the Mayor to set the tone for the entire Village Board. As such, the Mayor needs to be an open-minded listener, a hard worker, a collegial team player, a clear communicator, and a competent manager who trusts his colleagues and leads by example.

I believe that I demonstrated some of these skills during my three years as the village’s Community Development Block Grant Coordinator, in my role in the passage of Nyack’s affordable housing law, as the former Chair of our Nyack Democratic Committee, and in the everyday job of constituent service.

- As CDBG Coordinator I assembled teams that were representative of Nyack in all of its diversity; conducted many public meetings – often outside of Village Hall -- where various proposals were discussed and weighed; publicized these meetings in the media; took the minutes and distributed them to all members; invited outsiders and county officials to attend them; and presented our findings to the Village Board. The results – Nyack ultimately received federal funding that resulted in the public bathrooms in Memorial Park, new sidewalks, and other funding to support Nyack’s low-income and/or handicapped people.
- Nyack’s affordable housing law, requiring 20% of all new residential construction of 5 units or more to be “affordable,” was the first of its type in Rockland County. I’m always looking for ways to learn from other communities, and it was a similar ordinance in the Town of Greenburgh that inspired me to propose Nyack’s law. Although it took a long time to pass the legislation in its final form, it was worth it: the law passed unanimously, the first 10 such units on South Broadway are now nearly complete, and I can think of no other law on our books that says more about our inclusivity and conscience as a village than this one.
- I was Chairman of the Nyack Democratic Committee from 1997 – 2003. Talk about baptism under fire! Way back in 1997 we Democrats controlled the Village Board but not the Mayor’s office and Nyack was much more of a “two-party village” than it is today. Our goal that year was to retain control of the Board and win the Mayor’s office, and we thought we had all the right candidates in place for a clean sweep. Then two Committee Chairs resigned in rapid succession, our candidate for Mayor [bowed out], and our third Chair in less than a year resigned.

The Committee offered an inexperienced rookie (me) the Chair. I accepted. The trouble was, I had been a Committee member for less than a year since winning the seat in a primary in 1996 and the rest of the Committee was fractured, disorganized, dispirited, and not fully supportive of the two Trustee candidates whom

we needed to re-elect to retain control of the Board. I worked for much of that summer and fall on their re-election, cajoling Committee members and voters, creating palm cards from photography to written copy, walking the village, and organizing phone banks, fund-raisers, and mailers, you name it. Our opponents raised \$20,000 and outspent us 10 – 1! In the end, although we lost the Mayor's race, the voters of Nyack re-elected our two Trustees, we retained Democratic control of the Village Board, and we've retained it ever since.

- The most gratifying part of my job is constituent service. My telephone number is listed as a backup number to Village Hall, I try to provide the fastest and best service that I can by phone, email, or in person, and am always glad to help any citizen who needs help.

Outside of my work for the Village of Nyack I believe that I demonstrated some of the leadership skills I mentioned above during my many years as the Director of International Operations for one of Rockland County's largest and most successful public companies, Matrix Corporation (Orangeburg), and during my eight years as a Social Studies teacher at public schools in the Bronx.

- At Matrix I was responsible for managing our department's expenses and revenues, setting its goals, motivating and managing employees on three continents, working with colleagues from all departments at the home office, and supporting customers on six continents. Our department consistently led Matrix in profitability and, most importantly, customer satisfaction. Our customers always knew that I regarded my first job as representing their interests and the team that reported to me always knew that I "had their back."
- During my eight years teaching in the Bronx, two of my three principals have asked me to serve as a member of the School Leadership Team; the faculty at the other elected me as its UFT representative. Both of these positions place(d) a premium on communication and collaboration.

If my previous jobs were just that, a "job," teaching has become my career. Nothing I have ever done approaches the complexity and difficulty of being a teacher, has required a greater variety of skills, or has been as frustrating and satisfying. As a teacher, I work for my students and I measure my success by their success. I was particularly gratified and touched by what one of our graduating seniors wrote in my yearbook last June: "Kavesh, aka hashbrowns. You're an excellent Economics teacher and an even better person. I hope your career keeps you happy. Never have I seen you once put yourself before others. You're a very generous person. Rosie." Rosa Rodriguez perfectly defined the job of a public servant: never put yourself before others.

Working for the people of Nyack has been a privilege that I'll always be grateful for and I want to thank you for having hired me to work for you for these last eight years. I'm hoping you'll hire me for two more. Thanks also for having taken the time to read all this. See you at the convention and as I walk around the village,



Richard, 5/10/09