

## 2015 Sustainable Saratoga Candidate Survey

**CANDIDATE NAME:** Joanne Yepsen

**CANDIDATE FOR (OFFICE):** Mayor

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### **Question #1: What sustainability initiatives or efforts have you implemented or advanced as an elected official or private citizen?**

I am very proud to say that I have supported several sustainability initiatives, as Mayor, as Supervisor and as a private citizen. In 2009, I co-founded Sustainable Saratoga as a grassroots, educational organization to better serve our city and advance sustainable initiatives. When I ran for office in 2013, I promised that sustainable development in Saratoga Springs would be a major goal of my administration, and as your Mayor, I made it one of my highest priorities. Now, I am seeking reelection in November because there is more we need to accomplish.

I am proud that in my first term our City Council approved a new Comprehensive Plan that replaces the 2001 plan. With this, we have continued the “City in the Country” theme that I believe is essential to the quality of life of Saratoga. My administration’s efforts to balance economic growth with sustainable development and open space preservation has resulted in:

- Opposition to full casino resort
- Working toward a complete streets plan with CDTC
- Construction of safe routes to school
- Implementation of Solarize Saratoga
- Securing \$1.6 M in grant funding to construct Geyser Road Trail
- Prioritizing the downtown connector as next section of Greenbelt Trail
- Establishing a Housing Task Force to create solutions for workforce housing and permanent housing for homeless veterans
- Purchase of 5 acres on the Kayaderosseras
- Completion and opening of Waterfront Park
- Advancing Climate Smart Communities benchmarks in energy savings, protection of natural resources and accomplishing walkability at the bronze level
- Including first electric Zamboni for ice rink in capital budget
- Establishing an Arts Commission to enhance sustainable creative economy
- Resurrected the Open Space Advisory Committee
- Implemented a bike-share program

This year, I also worked with Saratoga PLAN to purchase the Pitney Farm and the development rights for one of the last remaining farms in Saratoga. The farm is 166 acres, easily accessible to town and an ideal location for a community farm and agricultural educational center. This has been a top conservation project for Saratoga, and

I am thrilled to say that with overwhelming support from our community, we will realize our collective dream of protecting the Pitney Farm with Open Space Bonding Authority.

During the past year, Saratoga was also very fortunate to complete the waterfront park on Saratoga Lake. This park provides much needed open space for families to gather, offering a picnic area, gazebo, and kayak launch. For the many families in our community who cannot afford to own homes on the lake and now have access to the lake; the new waterfront park gives us all an opportunity year round to enjoy the park.

**Question #2: What, if anything, would you propose to do locally to confront climate change?**

I am proud of my proven track record confronting climate change throughout Saratoga Springs. Before I became mayor, I worked with Sustainable Saratoga to get the city to commit US Conference of Mayors' Cool Cities agreement and we became the 100th Climate Smart Community in NYS. I want Saratoga Springs to be a leader in the fight against climate change. In my two years as mayor, we have steadily moved toward that goal.

The overall theme of the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan is sustainability and will we not compromise our city's future; weaving in significant alternative energy in this plan was more crucial than ever in our fight against climate change. Future development must be designed in ways that protect our water resources and our open spaces, while also minimizing pollution and increasing energy efficiency. Under the updated plan, we will increase recycling, expand hazardous waste removal opportunities, and promote renewable energy projects throughout our community. Additionally, I have consistently worked toward making Saratoga more conducive to walking, biking, and public transportation, eliminating the need of only cars to get around in our city.

Recently, I've introduced the next priority for our community in the area of planning and economic development – The Unified Development Ordinance process. This will allow our residents and businesses to have a voice in a thorough review and update of our city's ordinances. I will continue to work toward green proposals in a second term, while making Saratoga an example of how we can fight climate change on a local level.

**Question #3: The City Council recently adopted a new Comprehensive Plan, which embodies and continues the “City in the Country” vision for Saratoga Springs. According to the Comprehensive Plan: “This concept reflects a city with an intensively developed urban core and an economically vibrant central business district, with well-defined urban edges and an outlying area of rural character, comprised of agriculture, open lands, natural and diverse environmental resources, and low density development.”**

**Do you support the “City in the Country” vision?**

Yes and have for over 10 years. As a founding board member of Saratoga PLAN, I understand that we need to ensure that our city is successful and maintains the quality of life we enjoy, both to visit and to call home. Therefore, we must continue seek a balance between enabling our downtown businesses to thrive and preserving the natural beauty

that surrounds us. We, as a city, must work together to find solutions for the future that bolster Saratoga as a city-in-the-country by supporting vibrancy in our downtown area.

My administration is doing this. My office created the city's first Business Advisory Council to make recommendations for sustainable economic growth. At the same time, I have worked to balance development projects with rural preservation efforts. We secured a \$1.6 million state grant for the creation of a bike and pedestrian trail that will connect the Geysers Crest neighborhoods – 22% of our city residents- with Spa State Park in the coming year - a project I have been personally invested in for years and one that I am excited to see through. This past July, we opened up a Saratoga Lake Waterfront Park as well and declared the greenbelt trail as a priority, accomplishing multi modal and connectivity between our three urban parks – High Rock, Congress, and Spa State Park.

**Do you believe that sustainable economic growth can be achieved through this vision?**

Yes. Our city-in-the-country vision focuses on long-term economic growth that is both sustainable and realistic. The City Council's Comprehensive Plan, passed in June of this year, has four guiding principles designed to achieve such growth, with a focus on economic stability, environmental resiliency, efficient transportation, and a commitment to the character of our community. Economic growth and sustainability are not mutually exclusive goals, as evidenced by recent studies that have found the presence of open public spaces to improve the economy and community property values alike.

Downtown traffic in our downtown area shows congestion and a need for a long-term plan. We need more parking in our city. On the other hand, we must continue to encourage sustainable transportation options by making Saratoga more bike- and pedestrian-friendly. These solutions compliment, rather than jeopardize, one another.

**Do you think the “City in the Country” vision should be altered? If so, how?**

Our city-in-the-country vision proves to be successful economically and environmentally and must be maintained.

**Question #4: What comments do you have about the following priority issues for Sustainable Saratoga?**

**Affordable housing:**

Last fall I appointed top agency heads to serve on a Housing Task Force to bring additional low to moderate housing to the table. We must find more solutions to offer housing in all price points in our city. As Mayor, I also signed a national pledge to end veteran homelessness and built a coalition with four other mayors in the Capital Region by the end of 2015. I'm proud to announce we have completed our pledge in Saratoga Springs. All 18 homeless veterans identified in our city have a place they can call home. I hear every day we are out pricing ourselves out of our city. Homelessness is growing and we will get people off the streets through the continuum of care program we have created and create more affordable housing.

My administration, to include more affordable and workforce housing, encourage developers who come through City Hall with new projects. We are also working with non-profits and the housing authority closely to establish public private projects. We should also look at creating more apartment and carriage house options.

**Managing downtown parking:**

Traffic and parking issues are signs of downtown's success and it's time for a master plan to better utilize and increase the amount of parking.

My office recently received two responses to a Request for Proposal asking for a minimum of 600 parking spots though a comprehensive mixed use design on the High Rock lot, one of the most valuable properties in downtown.

Our aim is to incorporate a new parking structure into a larger, long-range vision to ensure that the City Center needs are met in the near future and that the other needs of our city are considered and ensure street activity and connectivity in our downtown. In line with this effort, my office initiated a linkage study (Complete Streets Master Plan) to address how best to get residents and visitors around downtown and all over the City, to help deal with the increasing traffic congestion. As part of this we are working towards a more pedestrian and bike friendly city as well as park and shuttle solutions.

Also, I recently announced a Downtown Parking Taskforce, to be comprised of members of the business community and City Hall departments, to make our current parking inventory more efficient and effective, while developing a long-term plan to address the parking needs and challenges of our downtown. This Task Force will be a non-partisan group tasked with studying approaches adopted by other cities, collecting data and community input, and making recommendations to City Council. I look forward to announcing the members soon.

**Waste management, including plastic bag reduction:**

I fully support Sustainable Saratoga's Bring Your Own Bag initiative where I believe it will make a large dent in the 10 million plastic bags that are discarded annually. I have regularly met with the subcommittee to advance the initiative. My office has worked with Hannaford and Price Chopper to further reduce thin plastic bags and facilitated meetings for Sustainable Saratoga & sponsored a presentation by Sustainable Saratoga sub committee on City Council agendas.

**Promoting renewable energy:**

I have and will continue to fight to increase renewable energy use in our city. Some exciting advances our Council has discussed and implemented include solar opportunities for our city and for residents, LED lighting, electric charges, and obtaining technical support from NYSERDA, DEC, and other state agencies. Our Climate Smart Communities Taskforce is utilizing the full energy inventory that was conducted a couple of years ago to set baselines and benchmarks.

**Expanding the city's urban forest, and increasing green infrastructure:**

I am putting the creation of the Saratoga Springs Greenbelt trail a priority. It will make our city the hub of a trails system having significant health, economic, and mobility benefits. We are currently in talks with the EPA, National Grid and private property owners to create a multi-use pathway that would act as a downtown connector from the trail. This is a long-term project and I promise to continue to see it through by seeking funding and resources needed.

**Question #5: If elected, what types of sustainability efforts (other than those listed above) would you promote or emphasize?**

Implement Complete Streets Plan

Open Space Preservation New Referendum

Creation of Urban Parks

More Community gardens

Increase in funding for urban forestry

Also, we are currently negotiating with the Spa City Recycling plant on South Franklin Street that could give the city access to the land. This action will provide a calmer residential neighborhood, allow for more sustainable development as an artist and mixed-use area and be more environmentally sound.