

2015 Sustainable Saratoga Candidate Survey

CANDIDATE NAME: Ken Ivins

CANDIDATE FOR (OFFICE): Commissioner of Finance

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

During my first term in office I started the “Complete Streets” initiative that has taken hold in the city. Here is the Vision from the September 2011 Draft Policy.

Vision

The City of Saratoga Springs recognizes the absolute necessity of promoting pedestrian, bicycle and public transportation travel as an alternative to the automobile in order to protect all road users, reduce negative environmental impacts, promote healthy living, and advance the well-being of commuters. Furthermore, the Town acknowledges that as public spaces, roads must be designed to afford safety and accessibility to all users. Finally, the Town recognizes that the full integration of all modes of travel in the design of streets and highways will increase the capacity and efficiency of the road network, reduce traffic congestion by improving mobility options, limit greenhouse gas emissions, and improve the general quality of life.

The City of Saratoga Springs therefore establishes and adopts this Complete Streets Policy in order to promote modes of transportation other than the automobile, including walking, biking, and mass transit, to make these modes of transportation safe and convenient for users of all ages and abilities, to reduce vehicle miles traveled within the City and the associated negative environmental impacts, to promote healthy lifestyles, to reduce the cost of commuting and to anticipate and facilitate future demand for walking, biking and other alternative transportation modes.

To effectuate and enforce this Policy, the City commissions the development of a Shared Access Advisory Board.

In addition I started a community spruce up/ cleanup/ improvement of the Skidmore’s Northwoods. It has evolved a lot of the years and is currently a project that the students/stewarts continue to this day. I am still called on to assist with the procurement of supplies when needed.

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

Climate change is a global issue. Although, we as individuals can do small things to work on this issue and if enough people all do the same then big strides can be made.

I have driven four different hybrid cars over the last twelve years. In addition, my example has rubbed off on my daughter and her boyfriend who also now drive hybrid cars as well.

In addition, I am an avid bike rider and try to peddle to work a couple of days a week to Ballston Spa. I also use the bike to campaign. In fact, the voters in Geysers Crest note

when I am campaigning there and ask me if I am out on my bike again. I think if we as leaders expect to make decisions about bike safety and accessibility we need to get out there ourselves.

This is why I initiated the “Complete Streets” local law while in office my first term. The more people walk and ride bikes, the smaller carbon foot print we will have. Plus it is healthier for all of us.

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?

As a general concept I do support the City in the Country idea. I like the idea of a dense urban core, making everyday needs and wants as accessible as possible. If we can detract people from getting into their cars that would reduce traffic congestion, and inspire a healthier and more interactive community.

We should attempt to preserve the greenbelt whenever we can. We need that contrast to reduce sprawl and allow for a higher quality of life.

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

This is the big question whether this goal can be achieved. Unfortunately if you ask 10 people you will probably get 10 opinions. There is no way to even determine the real answer because if you are wrong the consequences either way could be devastating by making the city too expensive for most people to live in or destroying much beloved green space.

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

I never believe in absolutes. I have a problem with locking the gates and not allowing anything else to be developed and have a problem with developing every square inch of available land. We are fortunate in that a lot of the city will not be encroached on. Things like the State Park, Skidmore’s Northwoods and natural wetlands throughout our borders will restrict development and maintain green space.

I believe every project, no matter where it is located, the core, the edge, etc. all need to be evaluated on an individual basis. In my opinion, projects that produce good solid jobs brings in more revenue to the community than the services required to maintain them should be encouraged and given priority. Then each project needs to be tailored to enhance or minimize their surrounding impact.

Unfortunately this is not a “Sim City” game where we can pick and choose every aspect of what goes where. Market forces, developer vision, business sense, operating capital and other forces beyond the average person’s control determines projects brought to the city. In addition, consensus on each project is 100% unrealistic.

I would not propose a rock solid alteration but suggest that each idea presented be evaluated by the community and review its positives and negatives.

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

Affordable housing:

Affordable housing has been a huge issue for many generations. My parents struggled to get into a home, I had trouble getting into a house and my daughter had to move out of town to find a house she could afford.

There is no one thing we can do to ensure the affordability to live our city but must approach it from many angles. Things like, building costs, property taxes, solid job creation are just a few areas that must be addressed.

We are blessed with a wide variety of good paying jobs, but we cannot sit back and relax. Instead, we need to constantly look at employers who bring reliable, good paying jobs to the area.

Our planning process adds a lot of cost to any home built in this city. If we truly want to create affordable housing through the private sector then we need look closely at ways to stream line the process. Plus more work can be done through government and non-profit channels as well.

Keeping taxes/fees down always make things more affordable. A multi angle tactic needs to be used to reach our goal of affordability.

Managing downtown parking:

Parking is another issue that will take a multi angle approach. A multiuse facility is a good start but not the final answer. Working together with developers, the downtown business and government officials will be the key to making a dent in this issue.

We need a comprehensive approach to parking. In my opinion, trying to keep driving minimized by locals is step number one.

Waste management, including plastic bag reduction:

I have always been a proponent of recycling. My wife and I recycled over 30 years ago in Vermont. Even now we recycle close to 70% of our household waste. We even compost in the back yard.

We also try and use tote bags whenever we can. When we do get plastic bags we use them at least twice or take them back to the store for recycling.

The key to anything is to make it easy on the consumer. Single source recycling has helped and encouraging more items will only improve our situation.

Promoting renewable energy:

Promoting renewable energy is a good goal but the key is to make it economically viable. The large majority of people will not spend extra to do this. Solarize Saratoga is a nice initiative. It will allow our city's collective buying power to negotiate the best price for our citizens to help transition into using solar panels.

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

Again this comes to economics. Most people like the trees and flowers but would not vote to increase taxes any significant amount to add more.

Sustainable Saratoga should be applauding for their tree planting efforts done by volunteers. Green space of any size is healthy both physically and emotionally.

While campaigning someone mentioned planting trees in the median on the arterial (Rt 50) between downtown and the mall area. This would mean getting permission from the state but something to work on.

My personal beef is the power company trimming trees for wires. I would rather see us focus on finding the money to bury those wires on key roadways (like Union Ave., East Ave., etc). This would increase the urban forest and ascetics of the key tourist areas.

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

I have touched on this briefly but want to expand on a key point. I would like to work with Sustainable Saratoga, the Chamber, the planning department and other interested parties to work together to improve our current system of building and planning. Small, simple projects are treated much like the larger ones. This is an undue expense by people who probably are already budget conscious. This current challenge has acted as a barrier for many to make even the smallest of upgrades. The goal would be to work together; that would help reduce the cost of worthwhile projects while insuring the public, as a whole, is given an opportunity for public input.