

Meet the Candidates

write in questions

8/24/2019

1. With roads in outlying areas in states of disrepair, other than physical posturing, why hasn't more attention been paid to those areas?

The Town Highway budget provides for general maintenance and for capital improvements of the roads each year. All Town roads receive yearly maintenance - such as the ditching and grading of gravel roads, the patching of potholes and the cutting back of brush in the right of way. Each year capital improvements - such as the replacement of culverts, the reconstruction of road base and the resurfacing of the paved roads - are done. Each year we spend, on average, \$400,000 to do all of that. On a scale of 1 to 10, we would love to maintain all roads at 7 or better. With more than 70 miles of Town Road to take care of, keep in shape, and improve it is hard to keep up with that goal but we are closing in on it. The most extensive stretches of Town Roads are in the northwest section of the Town and we have been concentrating our recent efforts in that area. The Town has reconstructed and resurfaced 12 miles of road from Loon Lake to North Creek in the past 5 years (Hardscrabble, Bird Pond, and Igera). We are planning to begin to reconstruct North Gore Road from Igera Road to the county line starting in 2020.

2. **Road repair:** Why are the only roads being paved in the "Chestertown" hamlet? Is there a fairer approach as to how, where and why the roads are paved/chip sealed? Is this a part of the Supervisor/Town Boards job?

The Highway Superintendent is in charge of developing the paving work plan for the Town and figuring out the most cost effective way to resurface the most miles of Town Roads each with the money we have to work with. The yearly work plan and budget is coordinated with the Supervisor and presented to the Town Board for approval. The Town Board takes into account a variety of factors in deciding what is best for the Town.

The agreed upon plan has been to upgrade all town roads by investing first in road base - the foundation of the road - and resurfacing as much as possible. By using chip seal in certain areas, more miles of roads can be

improved in any given year. In areas where the base is good, repaving is sufficient. A road with a good base will hold pavement longer. So, a road that has chip seal on it now may get paved a later and will be in better shape to hold up longer - and therefore more economical for the Town in the long run.

3. **Blight:** Even with the apparent zoning laws in force, there has been an influx of rural blight in the Town of Chester. What action or actions should be taken to address this problem?

Why is blight a problem in Chester? That is the first question that needs to be answered before any effective action to remedy the situation can be done. There have been a variety of answers to that question. For example, if the cause is due to poverty, then the remedy is economic. If it is due to lack of caring, then the remedy is social.

The Town's approach is a combination of incentive and deterrence. The new Zoning Enforcement Officer is working on ways to help people economically clean up their place (incentive). We are now able to impose fines for violations of the Property Maintenance law (deterrence).

Understandably, giving fines to our citizens is our last resort but it is a means the Town will use in order to curb blight.

We are also facilitating the formation of community groups who will help raise awareness and increase pride in where we live and instill a sense of responsibility for keeping our community tidy. To date, few citizens have indicated a desire to take community-based action on improving their neighborhoods, but we will continue to promote the idea and hopefully it will catch on.

4. **Taxes for land:** In the past 3-4 years the Town has been given or accepted for a very minimal fee (2) pieces of property. Does this reduce the tax rolls? Do you think is a good move for the Town?

The total assessment of real property in Chester has increased nearly \$5,000,000 over the past 3 years. The two parcels of land accepted by the Town in the past 3 years are valued at \$77,000 and have not had a negative effect on the tax rolls. This is a good move for the Town only because it is part of a larger strategy that will continue to pay back our efforts.

One parcel is adjacent to the water wells for Pottersville Water District. This 2 acre parcel was a gift and helps protect the water supply for over 90 homes and businesses. Any infringement on our well field area hampers our ability to produce quality water in that location and is costly to relocate.

The other parcel is a land-locked 104 acres of forest land nearly adjacent to Town Municipal Center property. Its proximity to the hamlet made it a prime candidate for expansion of the Chester Challenge trail system (and already hosts 2 snowmobile trails). It is also to be managed as a multi-use working forest - just as Dynamite Hill and the Municipal Center property are. Its recreation value and timber value will give return on the investment.

The biggest economic drivers for our community at this time are tourism and retirees. Forestry/logging is showing a decline but it is a very important sector of our community. Having community recreation amenities makes Chester more attractive, not just for tourists but also for people looking to relocate. An added bonus is that the Town is able to keep forest land in forest production and is able to produce income for the Town over time. The acquisition of these two parcels of land strengthens Chester's economic activity and protects our community's critical water resources.

5. **Landfill fee:** Do you feel the residents should have to pay the "5.00" for \$50.00 land fill card fee rather than having the FREE card?? They are also paying their taxes as landfill expenses are an item in the budget.

The Town's Transfer Station operations run a \$100,000 deficit each year. The hauling costs for removing solid waste from the transfer station nearly doubled in 2018. The tipping fees also saw a cost increase. In an effort to close the budget deficit, the Town Board restructured Transfer Station fees several years ago.

The clean up card was originally instituted to help citizens clean up their homes and properties in the spring. It was extended to cover for the whole year and, therefore, many more people have taken advantage of this program and taxpayers have picked up the tab for the expanded service.

The value of the so-called "free" clean up card actually costs the Town \$75 in services. The Board looked at the history and purpose behind the clean up card and decided that it was reasonable to start charging a nominal fee

for the clean up card let the people who are generating the trash pay a small portion of what it really costs.

6. **For Mr. Leggett:** Could you outline what you have done in office to merit reelection?

The focus of my first term has been to grow the economy, create government efficiency, improve customer service, and encourage citizen participation. We have made great strides in all these sectors.

The Economic Development Initiative (EDI) was started within my first four months in office. The kick off meeting attracted over 80 residents whose input produced guidance for an economic strategic plan for the Town and business groups to follow in order to produce a thriving, quality community.

One of the direct outcomes of the EDI is an annual trade fair at North Warren Central School where students can meet trade union representative and be exposed to career opportunities in the trades. This was in response to a need identified in the EDI for growing the number of people and businesses who can provide construction services. It is a small start but it will build momentum and it addresses a weak link in growing our economy.

A Zoning Ordinance Review Committee (ZORC) was established with the task of revising problematic sections of the Zoning Code with the purpose of improving the administration and application of the Code. I had observed Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Town Board meeting for 3 years prior to taking office.

The ZORC was a result of my observations. Its purpose was to make our government more responsive and effective. A citizen committee was formed to craft changes to the Code that would help the process not only for the boards but also for the applicants. By keeping the process local we were able to make this a document that reflects the uniqueness of our Town.

The Town works with a very tight budget and we have held to the tax cap each year it has been in place. This is in spite of the fact that the tax cap is usually less than half the cost increase for health insurance alone - not to

mention other cost increases. I am good with numbers and have been able to produce a budget that meets our needs and keeps us with one of the lowest tax rates in the County for a town our size.

It is imperative that we do things more efficiently in order to maintain and improve our functions and keep a lid on the budget. In the General Fund, personnel costs have been reduced by 2.2% since 2015 yet we have been able to improve services to our residents and guests. Through skillful budgeting we have been able to absorb a 250% increase in the cost of Emergency Medical Services (+\$120,000) in the past 2 years. It is imperative that the Town support critical services and I am proud to we have been able to do that and to also increase the level of EMS care for our residents.

The Town is here for the people, by the people. I stress the importance to all of our employees that we are in a customer service business: we take care of people and people's needs. Therefore we are as helpful and courteous as we can be and we work to find solutions to problems the best we can. It is a never ending task and continue to work at doing better at what we do. Many people have commented on how easy and comfortable it has been to do business with the Town.

We have expanded our youth programs and, most recently, we have facilitated the formation of a Seniors group. The Town will provide support for them to develop programs for Seniors - which is a growing and vital part of our community.

I have an open door policy. People are free to walk directly into my office and discuss what is on their mind. We take care of what we can then and there and I will do follow up for items that can't be settled right then. This is in line with my goals for customer service and for engaging community involvement.

A very important but often overlooked aspect of the Supervisor post is its role in running the County. The Board of Supervisors oversees a \$152,000,000 annual budget and operations of 34 departments and over 800 employees. During the past 4 years the County leadership has chosen me to be chairman of the Criminal Justice/Public Safety committee - which

oversees the operations of the Sheriff's Office, District Attorney, Public Defender, Assigned Counsel, Probation, Office of Emergency Services and Fire Safety/Building Codes. I am also vice chair of the Legislative and Rules, County Facilities, and Support Services Committees and vice chair of the Warren-Washington County Industrial Development Authority. These are all important roles and it reflects well on the Town of Chester.

7. **For Mr. Maday:** Could you explain why you are qualified to be Town Supervisor?

8. **Board Agenda:** Would you make sure the agenda is posted one week before the board meeting with no late changes?

A draft agenda can be posted early - we shoot for the Thursday before a meeting - but to limit changes to a week before the meeting would hamper the operations of the Town. Not all items for consideration by the Board are available that early. With only one meeting a month we try to take care of as much business as we can, as soon as we can. That means allowing for additions to the agenda as much as is practical.