

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

Ben Baskin, Spokesperson for Concerned Citizens for Smart Growth
(518) 885-1711; bjwalter@nycap.rr.com
CCSG web site: www.saveballston.com

Town of Ballston Candidates Respond to Concerned Citizens for Smart Growth (CCSG) 2007 Platform Dateline: Ballston, October 29, 2007

CCSG asked the candidates running for Ballston Town Council and Town Supervisor to publicly support 5 new policies for encouraging smart growth in Ballston. CCSG would like to thank the candidates for providing their positions on these policies, and for the evident time and energy they put into their responses. The voters should know that all candidates expressed interest in promoting smart growth and learning more about how we can work together to implement smart growth in Ballston. CCSG believes smart growth is one of the most important issues facing Ballston at this pivotal time in its history. CCSG urges the voters to consider the candidates' positions below when deciding who will best encourage strong economic development while protecting Ballston's small town, rural quality of life.

In order to facilitate comparison, and to fit within the limited format of a newspaper article, CCSG devised a score sheet. Readers are strongly encouraged to read the candidates' full responses at the CCSG web site: www.saveballston.com, so they can hear from the candidates in their own words and draw their own conclusions. Scoring is inherently a subjective exercise. It was done with some reluctance, but in the hopes of reaching a broader audience. For the scores below, 5 people in the CCSG organizing committee conducted independent ratings and the scores presented are the pooled consensus. Though the absolute scores can be debated, we believe the relative scores accurately reflect the relative strengths of the candidates towards the 5-plank CCSG smart growth agenda at this point in time. A full explanation of the 5 CCSG policies can also be found at the above web site.

Readers should also keep in mind that candidates only had about one week to respond to CCSG's request, and towards the end of their campaigns. Therefore, a lack of fine detail and firm commitment in a number of their responses can be expected. The ratings scale below sought to reflect this understandable lack of certainty.

Candidates were scored according to the following formula:

In favor of the policy = +1

Favorably open to it, but not committed to the specifics as presented = +1/2

Non-committal = 0

Tending to opposition = -1/2

Opposed = -1

CANDIDATES**TOTAL SMART GROWTH SCORES**

(Total potential range of scores is -5 to +5. Actual range is -0.5 to +4.0)

	1 60 K Size Cap	2 2% Dedicated Open Space Program	3 \$1,000 Rec. Fee	4 Term Easement	5 Transfer of Devel. Rights Program	TOTAL
Southworth:	+1	+1/2	+1	+1/2	+1/2	= +3.5
Townley:	- 1	+1/2	+1/2	0	- 1/2	= - 0.5
Ireland:	0	+1/2	+1/2	+1	+1/2	= +2.5
Seymour:	+1	+1/2	+1	+1/2	+1	= +4.0
Szczepaniak:	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Conclusion: On the 5 policy issues under discussion, Patti Southworth appears to be a stronger smart-growth candidate than Harold Townley for Ballston Town Supervisor. In the race for Ballston Town Board, for the 5 policy issues under discussion, George Seymour appears to be, overall, a stronger smart-growth candidate than Kim Ireland, though the differences are not as great as in the Town Supervisor race. These scores roughly reflect candidates' opinions at one point in time. All candidates have indicated that they are open to learning and dialogue regarding these issues, and their positions could change as dialogue continues.

Summary of Candidates' Responses, with Scores

(Listed in alphabetical order by office)

Policy 1. Within 12 months of January 1, 2008, when new council members take office, enact a clear, strong building size cap of 60,000 square feet for single use commercial retail buildings that would completely protect Ballston from 'big box' development.

Candidates for Ballston Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth: In favor. Says, "I am in favor of a size cap of 60,000 square feet." Score: +1

Harold Townley: Opposed. Says, "I don't support changing the current zoning for single use commercial retail buildings." Score: -1

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: Non-committal. "I do not by any means reject this proposal but am not fully prepared to make such a commitment." Score: 0

George Seymour: In favor. "I would support a cap of 60,000 square feet for single use commercial buildings..." Score: +1

Tim Szczepaniak: Unknown

Policy 2. Dedicate at least 2% of the town budget annually (about \$100,000 in 2007) to an Open Space Protection Program for at least the next 10 years.

Patti Southworth: Open but non-committal. In favor of dedicated fund. Says amount will vary, but "funds should be put aside every year." Score = +1/2

Harold Townley: Open but non-committal. He "supports the concept of a yearly set-aside, but the exact amount is going to have to be decided each year..." Score = +1/2

Kim Ireland: Open but non-committal. Favors "putting a portion of the Town's annual budget aside for open space. She "would be cautious of mandating a certain percentage." Favors exploring the feasibility of a bond for financing. Score = +1/2

George Seymour: Open but non-committal. Says he is a "strong proponent of open space protection," but amount could vary with strength of economy. Score = +1/2

Tim Szczepaniak: Unknown

Policy 3. Increase the Parks and Recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling unit.

- Patti Southworth: In favor. "I am in favor of increasing the parks and recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling unit." Score = +1
- Harold Townley: Open but non-committal. He "believes that the fee could be raised again, if it can be shown that other similar communities are doing the same thing." Score = +1/2
- Kim Ireland: Open but non-committal. She believes, "that the Town needs to reevaluate its Parks and Rec. fees and consider increasing it." Says, "I am unsure if the blanket raising of the fee to \$1,000 is the best option at this time." Score = +1/2
- George Seymour: In favor. I would be in favor of increasing the Parks and Recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling. Score = +1
- Tim Szczepaniak: Unknown

Policy 4. Establish a Term Easement Program within 12 months of January 1, 2008.

- Patti Southworth: Open to it but non-committal. Says, "term easements can be a useful tool," and states, "To be appropriate for the Town of Ballston, the easement must be offset with additional revenue." Score = +1/2
- Harold Townley: Non-committal. "I am not a strong proponent of term easement program." He says, "However, I would be willing to consider a term easement program if there is enough Town-wide support for the program." Score = 0
- Kim Ireland: In favor. "I would be very open to working with organizations such as Saratoga PLAN...to investigate and potentially implement such a program." Also says, "I appreciate the capping of the tax impact..." Score = +1
- George Seymour: Open to it but non-committal. He "believes the issue does deserve serious consideration," and says, "but (I) would want to make sure the tax burden would not be too heavy." Score = +1/2
- Tim Szczepaniak: Unknown

Policy 5. Establish Residential and Commercial Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Programs within 24 months of January 1, 2008.

- Patti Southworth: In favor, though does not specifically indicate time frame. Score = +1/2
- Harold Townley: Tending to opposition. Says, "I don't believe that a TDR program is really feasible in a Town of our size." He says, "I don't think this is a realistic goal for the next 24 months, but looking down the road, as our Town continues to grow, it might be something we could consider. I would rather put my efforts into other open space conservation methods." Score = -1/2
- Kim Ireland: Open but non-committal. She says, "...a TDR program could create a revenue stream that has not previously been tapped by the Town while helping to preserve open space." Also, "Prior to making any concrete commitment, I would have to become more familiar with the program." Score = +1/2
- George Seymour: In favor, within time frame. Says he is, "especially concerned with high density zoning and feels that it is reasonable to require additional payments be paid to the town in such cases." Score = +1
- Tim Szczepaniak: Unknown

Responses from Candidates, unedited, unabridged, & listed in alphabetical order by office:

Policy 1. Within 12 months of January 1, 2008, when new council members take office, enact a clear, strong building size cap of 60,000 square feet for single use commercial retail buildings that would completely protect Ballston from 'big box' development.

Candidates for Ballston Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth

I am in favor of a size cap of 60,000 square feet. In office, I will bring forward a resolution to the town board regarding this issue.

Harold Townley

I don't support changing the current zoning for single use commercial retail buildings. CCSG, property owners, and a number of other stakeholder groups participated fully in the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) meetings. The zoning we have now came about as a result of extensive discussion, legal research, the advice of our consultant team, and compromise. I don't believe that any proposed projects since the zoning was enacted indicate that the limits we set were unwise or require change at this time. I believe in appropriately scaled retail and commercial development. I believe that this is what we've expressed in our comprehensive plan to be our Town's goal. This requires careful consideration of each project as it comes along as to its risks and benefits to the Town as a whole. I think that our current zoning allows that analysis to take place. Creating more restrictive zoning could subject the Town to costly legal challenges, and it could also restrict businesses from coming in that we could really use. For all of these reasons, I think that we're on the right track and I wouldn't change anything right now.

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: I strongly support policies and zoning that will protect our town's character and prevent over development. Laws are living documents that can be changed and updated and I do believe that it is appropriate to routinely review them. Knowing that Ballston and surrounding communities will continue to see development pressures, I understand how important zoning is to Ballston's future.

Having said this, we cannot close the door on potential economic development opportunities. There are areas of our town where residential and/or commercial development is appropriate. We must be sure that our zoning laws require that such development be done in a responsible manner that does not harm our town while still respecting individual property rights.

It is incumbent upon all elected officials to do their due diligence prior to making important decisions such as placing a new size cap. Though I understand and respect the concerns of CCSG, I do not believe it is appropriate at this point for me to commit to their capping suggestions. I do not by any mean reject this proposal but am not fully prepared to make such a commitment.

George Seymour: I would support a cap of 60,000 square feet for single use commercial buildings that would protect Ballston Development by Jan. 1, 2008.

Policy 2. Dedicate at least 2% of the town budget annually (about \$100,000 in 2007) to an Open Space Protection Program for at least the next 10 years.

Candidates for Ballston Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth: We should have a dedicated open space fund in Ballston. This will allow the town to build up funds for open space protection. The amount put into the fund each year will most likely vary depending on the revenue of the town, although funds should be put aside every year. Additionally, anytime a town board member recommends giving the board a raise, I will always make a counter recommendation to devote the money towards the dedicated fund.

Harold Townley: I support the concept of open space preservation in our Town, and I am also aware that there are insufficient grants and regional monies available to accomplish this without the need for the Town to provide at least some matching funds. This year's proposed budget sets aside \$100,000 towards the preservation of open space, and I support that budget proposal. However, I am reluctant to tie the Town's hands too much by promising that we will be able to do it every single year. There are too many variables outside the control of the Town, such as the real estate market and the amount of sales tax revenue we receive each year, which may fluctuate with the larger county and state economy. I would not want to have to institute a Town tax to fund it. So, rather than make a big empty promise, I'll just say that I support the concept of a yearly set-aside, but the exact amount is going to have to be decided each year as we consider the budget.

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: It is important that a town or any entity plan for the future. In the case of Ballston, as we continue to experience development pressure this will become increasingly important. I agree with the importance of putting a portion of the Town's annual budget aside for open space that can accumulate over time -- allowing for the Town to have the necessary resources when an appropriate project comes along.

I would be cautious of mandating a certain percentage of the Town's annual budget to be placed into such a dedicated fund. It is not fiscally responsible to tie ourselves to a set percentage each year to be placed in such a fund. Such decisions should be made annually based on the financial situation of the Town.

Each of the proposals suggested by the CCSG has merit and I would suggest they be further investigated. In particular I would like to review long term financing that would be made available through bonds as approved by the residents of the Town. The preservation of land that could be accomplished through the use of long term financing would spread the cost out over an extended period of time – allowing for both those in the present and in the future who benefit from land preservation to contribute to its cost.

George Seymour: I am a very strong proponent of Open Space Protection. However, I would like to stop short of promising to dedicate “at least 2% of the town budget annually for Open Space Protection for at least the next ten years.” Presently, much of the town revenue stream comes from shared sales tax generated in Saratoga County and from mortgage taxes. If there is a recession in the future, that could impact the sales tax and mortgage tax generated and that 2% might be needed to prevent tax increases to our residents. If the economy remains strong (there have been hints we are headed for a recession) – then it could be possible to save 2%. In addition, I would want to study the town finances in much more detail before I would commit to any ten year plans.

Policy 3. Increase the Parks and Recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling unit.

Candidates for Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth: I am in favor of increasing the parks and recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling unit.

Harold Townley: I voted a couple of years ago to increase the Parks and Recreation fee from \$200 per dwelling to \$500 per dwelling unit. I remember that the LCC recommended that increase. I believe that the fee could be increased again, if it can be shown that other similar communities are doing the same thing. I don't want to place too high of a burden on new people entering our community, but at the same time I recognize that we need to create parks and recreational opportunities for our residents.

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: During the League of Woman's Voters Candidate Forum I stated that I believe that the Town needs to reevaluate its Parks and Rec. fees and consider increasing it. Though the CCSG suggests that the fee be increased to \$1,000, I think it would benefit us to look at our various options. As indicated by CCSG, different towns assess their Parks and Rec. fees in different ways. I do believe that in the near future this needs to be addressed though I am unsure if the blanket raising of the fee to \$1000 is the best option at this time. I do believe we should look at different formulas for residential and commercial development.

George Seymour: I would be in favor of increasing the Parks and Recreation fee to \$1,000 per new dwelling. This is in line with what surrounding towns have done and would not raise taxes on any of our present residents.

Policy 4. Establish a Term Easement Program within 12 months of January 1, 2008.

Candidates for Ballston Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth: Term Easements can be a useful tool for protecting acreage in town. To be appropriate for the Town of Ballston, the easement must be offset with additional revenue so as to not affect the current tax rate of the town. Before the implementation of such a program, it is essential to inform the residents about how it will work and, specifically, that it is temporary and that the ownership of the property does not change.

Harold Townley: I am not a strong proponent of term easement programs. I would prefer that property be acquired through a straight purchase or purchase of development rights. I recently voiced my support for the PDR application of the Curtiss family on Hop City Road. However, I would be willing to consider a term easement program if there is enough Town-wide support for the program. We need to have one or more informational workshops and invite the public to express their opinion on the subject, which I promise I will listen to before making a final decision.

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: As we attempt to protect open space it will be important for the Town and its residents to use creative measure that will encourage land owners to protect their land. This is especially important for farmers who wish to continue to work their land. Term easements are one such way to accomplish this. I believe that the CCSG proposal should be closely examined and considered. I appreciate the capping of the tax impact to ensure that there is not a drastic shift of the tax burden to other land owners. I would be very open to working with organizations such Saratoga PLAN, The Nature Conservancy and others to investigate and potentially implement such a program.

George Seymour: I would be willing to look at the issue of term easements but I feel it would be premature to promise a term easement program by January 1, 2008 since I can not predict revenue streams and have not had an opportunity to learn all the details of the town budget. I very much like the concept of term easements to potentially save open space, but would want to make sure that the tax burden would not be too heavy on other residents. I do believe the issue does deserve serious consideration.

<p>Policy 5. Establish Residential and Commercial Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Programs within 24 months of January 1, 2008.</p>

Candidates for Ballston Town Supervisor

Patti Southworth: As part of the implementation of a TDR program in Ballston we will need to, as a town, decide where an increased density would be appropriate and where it would not. Of the different ways of enacting a TDR program, I feel we should use the method that calls for developers to pay a fee directly to the town (rather than allow developers to buy conservation easements from landowners), so we are able to most effectively and efficiently use the funds. As is the case with term easements, it is essential to inform the residents of the town about how this program will work.

Harold Townley: I don't believe that a TDR program is really feasible in a Town of our size (approximately 30 square miles). I am also concerned that we lack the administrative support for the implementation of such a program. For example, we don't have a Town planner, and we don't have an Open Space Coordinator like Clifton Park does. A TDR program might work at some point in the future, but I think we would need to add more staffing (and therefore more money) to make it work. I don't think this is a realistic goal for the next 24 months, but looking down the road, as our Town continues to grow, it might be something we could consider. I would rather put my efforts into other open space conservation methods.

Candidates for Ballston Town Council

Kim Ireland: The suggestion of a TDR program could create a revenue stream that has not previously been tapped by the Town while helping to preserve open space. I do wonder if there is value of approaching this as a regional concept versus town by town. Economies of scale may allow for a more beneficial program if more municipalities participate. I will admit that I am not fully familiar with such programs and prior to making any concrete commitment, I would have to become more familiar with the program as well as its potential successes and drawbacks.

George Seymour: I believe that residential and commercial transfer of development programs are a very interesting way to potentially fund open space or park development. I am especially concerned with high

density zoning and feel that it is reasonable to require additional payments be paid to the town in such cases. This would also be a way of saving open space or helping to fund new parks or recreational areas without adding taxes to our existing residents. I would hope that such a plan could be developed by Jan. 1, 2008.

General Comments from Candidates for Ballston Town Board

Harold Townley: If I am elected Supervisor, I would be interested in meeting with your group to learn more about your goals and initiatives, to draw from your experience and knowledge. I support smart growth, and I believe we will need to work together to make it happen.

Kim Ireland: Thank you for sharing your views with me and the other candidates. Upfront let me state that I do not believe I am currently in a position to commit to the exact perimeters of your platform. But, using your own words, I do believe your points are "discussion starters" for issues that undoubtedly will be important to Ballston's future. Once elected I will be open to listening to your views as well as to the views of people who may not necessary agree with your stances. Each decision I make will be done following due diligence on my part. Though I share your concerns of over development and appreciate your organization's suggestions, for me to state that I support the specifics of your platform outright without appropriate research and deliberation would be irresponsible on my part. Please know that I have read your material and below are my initial thoughts. I look forward to discussing these and other issues with your organization in the future.

Tim Szczepaniak: I have received the CCSG platform and think it is sufficient for future discussions. I apologize, but I have been extremely busy with our campaign. Once elected, I would like to meet with your organization which has some worthwhile considerations. Thanks for keeping me informed. (CCSG note: This is Mr. Szczepaniak's response in full.)

###