



Supervisor Virginia Stern's Newsletter

FALL 2010

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It is my pleasure to be able to produce and mail this newsletter at my own personal expense, with complimentary printing supplied by fellow citizen, former Councilman Mel Eiger. No public monies are involved and, of course, I take complete responsibility for the content.

How is the Stanford Town Board working?

As you know, I have been Supervisor of the Town of Stanford since January of this year. I ran on the Democratic, Independence and Conservative tickets, but I like to think of myself as your neighbor and steward - not as a partisan politician with a particular party agenda.

Honesty and directness are the moral precepts that guide me in my service and accountability to you as your Town Supervisor.

Far, far away in Washington, where the American battleground of politics is fought out on a daily basis in the White House, in Congress and in the courts, there are strictly held opinions about issues, many points of view and some very real divisions that often seem, these days, to be irreconcilable.

But far, far removed from the national scene are the small towns and communities of America, such as Stanford - where, I submit, the political divisions of Democrats, Republicans, Independents and Conservatives have virtually no relevance at all.

In Washington, they debate health care, tax reform, the economy, bailouts, national defense and other weighty matters. Here in Stanford, we face challenges that are entirely local and can best be addressed by a sense of community, neighborliness and cooperation.

Since January, the newly elected Republican Councilmen have created an atmosphere of partisan confrontation and general wrongheadedness on the Town Board that has deprived Stanford of potential benefits and has interfered with the smooth workings of your government.

I would appeal to Councilmen D'Agostino, Dewhirst and Flynn to really take a close look at me. I am Virginia Stern, your neighbor. I was elected at Town Supervisor BECAUSE I stand for a local, non-partisan approach to small town governance, BECAUSE I represent the desire for cooperation and consensus rather than divisive party politics. .

Obstructive, partisan politics have no place in Stanford's governance. I will continue to represent civility and thoughtful leadership. I will continue to work for all of the residents of Stanford to have the most fiscally prudent and capable government possible. I will continue to care about all of the people of Stanford and will continue to build a sense of community and public pride for us all.

Charles Hanlon for Town Board

In this November's election for one Town Board seat, I want to be perfectly clear. **I support Charles Hanlon, who is running on the Democratic, Independence and Taxpayers United lines.**

Charles has worked as both an Education Specialist and as a Systems Analyst for IBM. After retirement, he worked as an administrator in a not-for-profit social service organization. Charles' clear, decisive thinking, his great caring for people and his lifelong knowledge of our town will bring a depth and breadth of dialogue and opinion to the Town Board that will ensure that every decision the Board makes will be for the benefit of the residents of the town.

Charles Hanlon has lived in Stanford for 33 years. His family roots in the town go back to the 1700's.

The Republicans would like you to think that I support Chris Flynn for this election. That is not the truth.

When I became Supervisor, my Council seat was vacant, and it was up to the Board to appoint someone to fill the position. After almost a dozen names were suggested, it was clear that no independent nor moderate person would be acceptable to Councilman D'Agostino and Councilman Dewhirst. They were determined to deadlock the Board.

As Supervisor, I had great concern that your Town Board would be in a position of two-to-two deadlock and would not be able to get the important work of the town done without a full Board. It was also made apparent to me that Mr. Flynn was the only candidate whom the Republican Councilmen D'Agostino and Dewhirst would approve and not continue to paralyze the business of the Town Board from going forth.

My initial impression was that Mr. Flynn would be an independent thinker., but I was wrong. As a Councilman, Mr. Flynn has simply voted along party lines. He has not been the "swing vote" as he was quoted in a local newspaper. Simply put, Mr. Flynn's vote has consistently provided the majority vote that has delayed the progress of the Board on many issues.

Charles Hanlon, on the other hand, is an independent thinker who will always speak his mind and never put anything above the charge the voters will give him to represent the people of Stanford.

So – Here are the reasons to vote for Charles Hanlon for Town Board.

Charles Hanlon is truly an independent thinker. He will be a dedicated Councilman who will support open government, information to all residents about all matters and civil dialogue where there is a difference of opinion.

Charles Hanlon is a fiscal conservative who has the administrative and budgetary skills to be an unfailing watch dog on how your tax dollars are spent. .

Charles Hanlon will take on the tasks of a representative of the people with energy, intelligence and openness. He has both the time and dedication to attend all liaison meetings and to be constantly available to residents with questions or opinions.

Charles Hanlon will bring to the Board a keen ability to express his own opinions and listen to differing opinions. He will bring his own ideas and engage in civil, honest dialogues with all Town Board members. He will bring a willingness to help find the best, the consensus solutions and determinations that will make for a wise town government.

Charles Hanlon has no business interests or ties that will influence his thinking or his vote Charles will have only the good of the entire population as the basis for his considerations. Charles will have no conflicts of interest that would interfere with his honest representation of all the people of Stanford.

Charles Hanlon will earn his keep as your Councilman - not only in his fairness and dedication, but also in putting in the necessary hours which are, as we all know, paid for by the citizens' precious tax dollars.

I urge you to come out on election day and vote for Charles Hanlon. Your Town Board needs to get beyond the current partisan politics.

Charles shares the vision for a caring community, a financial vigilance to keep your town taxes low, a determination to acquire the resources to preserve our rural quality of life.. Charles stands for informed and open government and for the timely (and therefore fiscally prudent) improvements of our communal assets.

You can vote for Charles Hanlon on the Democratic line (row A), the Independence line (row D) or the Taxpayers United Line (row E)

'No' vote cost Stanford an opportunity to reap benefits of Greenway

In August, The Town of Stanford Town Board voted three to two to reject the Town's membership in the Hudson Valley Greenway Compact. That leaves Stanford the only municipality in the county that has refused to become a member.

Twenty years ago, New York State, under Governor Pataki, enacted the Hudson River Valley Greenway act to provide resources and guidelines for preserving our area's environmental and rural beauty and assets in the face of development and growth.

The vote to deprive Stanford of this successful program came after two presentations by John Clark of Dutchess County Planning and Mark Castiglione, Acting Executive Director of the NY State Hudson River Valley Greenway. The vote to deprive Stanford of this successful program came even after receiving letters from every Mayor and Supervisor of all the other 29 municipalities praising the Greenway program, urging Stanford to join. Each one proclaimed clearly and unequivocally that there were many benefits to be gained and absolutely no restrictions or controls on municipalities.

The Greenway Compact has served as a county-wide planning benchmark, resulting in the preservation of open spaces, the protection of precious agricultural soils and water resources. Because of the Greenway Compact, member municipalities have been able to protect the unique character of their communities and plan wisely for their own growth.

Dutchess County was a leader among counties to realize the value of this state offering. The County's Greenway Connections/Compact was the model for all of the 13 counties in the Hudson Valley region. The Compact has translated into numerous voluntary projects and partnerships to help communities preserve the environment while allowing people to live and thrive.

William Steinhaus, Dutchess County Executive, has stated that the Greenway is a "cornerstone" for the wise growth of the county. He has further stated that, because the program is based on purely advisory incentives and guidelines, the program offers a great deal of flexibility with no mandates or threat to home rule.

So - what are the specific benefits involved? Participation gives traction to a variety of financial and planning benefits. Greenway grants have helped towns complete Comprehensive Plans and Zoning Codes, helped build rail trails

and public spaces, helped preserve water resources and build water treatment facilities to protect our wells and creeks. Planning and technical advice, free to member municipalities, has helped shape walkable and beautiful communities. Each dollar in matching grants signifies savings to the taxpayer, no matter how small or great.

Despite all of this information about the value of the program and about the complete authority of town law, the vote in the Town of Stanford was defeated three to two, with the three Republican members voting against joining and the two Democrats voting in favor of joining.

Sadly, inexplicably, the Republican Councilmen continued to insist that membership in the Greenway Compact would subject the town to state control -despite the fact that the law states Home Rule is paramount - despite the letters from all municipal leaders affirming that Home Rule is always the final authority.

Engaged as our town currently is in updating its Master Plan, Stanford would have an abundance of help to be gained from membership in the Greenway Compact. These gains would have come from the strictly voluntary guidelines and free advice used to inform many municipal Comprehensive Plans. These gains would have come in the form of grant monies to fund the work of developing Stanford's Master Plan and the necessary zoning amendments to support the plan.

The Hudson Valley is a gift that we all need to take care of. Being a Greenway Compact member is a declaration of being a partner in caring for this region. Making use of all resources that are available would increase Stanford's ability to protect its own community and lands and to work with other communities to preserve the waterways and natural spaces that we all cherish.

This article appeared in the 7 October 2010 Valley Views column of the Poughkeepsie Journal

A Master Plan Committee Update

When I came into office, among my highest priorities was the completion of Stanford's Comprehensive Plan/Master Plan. An updated Master Plan is essential in defining the future vision of a town .

Without a Town Board approved Comprehensive/Master Plan and supportive zoning, a town has no legal protection against any developer's plan to destroy open space and to replace Stanford's rural beauty with "suburban sprawl". Think about the ongoing struggle that Pine Plains and Milan have been having with the Durst Corporation who proposed to build so many houses on the old Carvel property that it would increase the population more than 100%. Without a Comprehensive Plan and zoning, Pine Plains was truly the David to the Durst Goliath. If Pine Plains had not scrambled at the 13th hour to create and approve planning and zoning regulations, the town would have been overrun by a kind and quantity of development that would have changed the quality of life in the town forever.

For a town's Comprehensive or Master Plan to be legally protective, state law proscribes that the committee developing the plan be officially appointed by the Town Board.

The previous Codes Committee had worked for three years at a cost to the taxpayers of \$60,000 and had not produced a final formal document. Fresh ideas, new energy and a wider range of expertise was needed.

The current Master Plan Committee was officially formed. The membership consists of some old members of the Codes Committee and some new volunteers whose expertise and experience have enhanced the potential of this committee to produce a detailed and thorough document that will truly be a protective vision for our town.

After conducting interviews for a professional planner who will expedite the work, the Master Plan Committee is aiming toward being able to finish their task within a year's time. Throughout the process, all residents are invited to attend the meetings, to read the minutes, to participate in public opinion gathering sessions and to ask questions.

The official workings of the committee are always available on the Town's website. The Town calendar lists the meeting dates. You can read the minutes by clicking on minutes/agendas under Town Information. Under Advisory Committees you will find much more information on the Master Plan Committee, including a link to the Committee's own beautiful website.

If you don't use the internet, the schedule of meeting dates, copies of minutes, names of committee members and contact number for the Chair are available from the Town Clerk.

Highway Garage Update

There was a public hearing on the proposed new highway garage on 21 August 2010. There were about 90 people who attended.

The design engineer presented structural plans showing exactly what the garage will look like and how the space will be utilized. The new structure will be able to house and protect all of the Town's expensive trucks and equipment so that they will last longer and operate better. The building will be as efficient as possible with insulation and solar panels to produce savings on heating and electric bills.

The Town's accountant talked about how the project could best be funded using a combination of the Town's fund balance and a bond. With the currently low costs of construction and low interest rates on bonds, the town will be able to get the most for every dollar spent with little or no effect on our taxes.

The Town Board has officially established the project, which means that the engineer can finalize the plans so that the Town Board can then be able to have all the exact construction and financing figures to consider.

Stanford History Day

Our town has a magnificent history dating back to 1793, when it broke off from the Town of Washington. Stanford's illustrious ancestry, the remaining houses used for the Underground Railway during the Civil War, cemeteries that tell their own venerable histories, the several railroads that served Stanford for almost 75 years, the resorts and dance halls that drew many visitors, the changing faces of farms and businesses - all of this prompted me to envision a Stanford History Day where we could all be educated in the rich heritage of our town.

With the invaluable expertise, help and funding from the Stanford Historical Society, the Grange, the Lions Club, the Stanford Free Library, the Town Historian, the Stanford Fire Department and many residents, the town held its first Stanford History Day on 17 July 2010.

There were historical exhibits on almost every topic you could imagine, with photographs galore of our railroads, farms, mills and businesses, schools and the town's Attlebury one-room School house, still intact and on its original site. There was the Town's oldest fire truck along with many photographs and objects showing the history of our dedicated volunteer fire department. There were Civil War re-enactments, Civil War music, a Harriet Tubman re-enactment. There were spinning demonstrations, old-fashioned children's games, early American pastry, homemade strawberry shortcake and old-fashioned stone grinding of flour.

It was a beautiful day. Thank you to all who came and made it such a great day. And, for those of you who might have missed it, we are planning to make Stanford History Day an annual celebration - so - see you next year!

Stanford Community Day

Stanford Community Day, honoring the Cold Spring School PTA, was held on a glorious sunny day on 18 September. Sponsored by the Stanford Grange, Community Day is the product of the contributions of all the local civic groups in Stanford as well as the labor of many volunteers.

If you haven't read Heidi Johnson's columns in the Hudson Valley News, I'll tell you a bit about the day.

The Lions, the Garden Club, the Cold Spring PTA, the Stanford Nursery School, the Library, the Fire Department, the Historical Society were all represented. The Garden Club had some beautiful displays as well as competitions for floral arrangements, vegetables, fruits and plants and, of course, the funny "crazy creatures" contest. The Grange has a baking contest, and there was the Lion's Flea Market with all its myriad of offerings.

There was good food by both the Lion's Club and the Grange Snack Bar. And there were pies, cakes and cookies at the UCC booth. And I shouldn't fail to mention that many people took home a great chicken barbecue prepared by the Grange.

There was square dancing in front of the Grange, and entertainment at the Pavillion; Bee Bee the clown, comedy by the Pine Plains graduates' comedy improv group, Lost in a Cornfield, and some wonderful classical music and just plain fiddling by 4 of our local violinists, ranging in age from 6 years old to 14 years old.

I sponsored a rain barrel making workshop led by Cornell Extension, and a number of Stanford citizens went home with a 50 gallon rain barrel that will enable them to water lawns and gardens without having to use any precious ground water resources.

There were also a number of local artists displaying their works, inspiring and pleasing all of us with their talent.

And, there was, of course, the parade with many groups, response vehicles, antique cars and the wonderful Pine Plains Band. A great time was had by all!

Your Supervisor's Computer

The Republican Town Board members continue to state that the purchase of a new computer for the Supervisor's office has been a fiscal betrayal of the town. And so I have decided to let you know the other side of the story.

When I came into office, the computer available for the Supervisor to use was a 1998 "pieced-together computer with a 12" square monitor and an old and sluggish printer. Although there is high speed internet available to Town Hall, the speed of the computer, because of its age, was equivalent to dial-up speed (slow). The software was also obsolete.

I put the issue before the Town Board that the Supervisor's computer was inadequate to what is needed.

As your Supervisor, I am constantly searching for municipal resources, copies of state laws, grant opportunities, data of fiscal relevance for a municipality and supporting information on issues and complaints that residents bring to me.

In the first discussion of this, I was asked how much a computer and printer might cost. While I am fairly adept at using a computer and the internet to find information, I am not a "computer person". I guessed at about \$1000 - but that was only a guess - not a hard estimate.

Some members of the Board asked if I would have a professional consultant present a reasonable choice and estimate, and so Mr. James Jeffries of Northeast Computer Services, Rhinebeck did just that. Mr. Jeffries was the Supervisor of the Town of Milan for many years and is still involved in the Planning Board of Milan. His computer company provides services for a number of municipalities similar to Stanford.

Mr. Jeffries presented three choices for computers/printers and recommended the one finally purchased as being the most cost-efficient because of this model's proven lifespan and the ultimate savings in ink cartridges for the printer.

According to Mr. Jeffries recommendation letter:

Modern government administration and the resulting support to constituent services require contemporary resources to meet the growing information demand. From budget preparation and management to inquiry responses, both printed and electronic, computers and their peripherals have become indispensable tools for elected and appointed municipal personnel.

*Care should be exercised when selecting the components. When helping municipal clients make their selection we focus on (1) what the specific office needs are, (2) what is the intended use, (3) what is the anticipated longevity and (4) what are the security needs. **Taking the time to evaluate the needs will help the municipality meet their administration and constituent service goals while protecting the taxpayer from unnecessary repeat purchases or expensive upgrades.***

Councilmen D'Agostino and Dewhirst both stated that a Dell computer could be bought for \$500. Although I asked and waited two months for them to bring in the estimates and detailed descriptions of this computer, they never did.

The Consultant was very clear:

Any differential in cost between consumer brand and commercial brand products is well offset by warranty, longevity and durability and ultimately is reflected in prolonged savings to taxpayers through reduced service, upgrade and maintenance costs.

In May, after months of waiting, I finally asked the Board to approve the purchase of the computer and printer.

The Republican public notices continue to refer to the computer as Virginia's "personal computer". That is just silly. The computer is the Town of Stanford Supervisor's computer. It was purchased so that your Supervisor could accomplish the necessary tasks for the benefit of all of the residents of Stanford.

Again quoting the consultant:

*The use of square or box style screens has dropped from functional use. Instead, wide aspect screens provide for much more work area and can even be rotated to take advantage of a vertical aspect enabling the end user to see 100% of the page being worked on. **Less scrolling has been proven to mean greater productivity.** While separate high performance stereo components are available to enhance this experience, **we recommend small speakers attached on the monitor that achieve basic functions without additional cost.***

The final cost of the computer, software and printer was \$1600. The installation costs to install the components and all software and transfer all information to the new computer from the old one was \$522. **The Republican Board members have refused to pay the installation charges** as they were not detailed in the original estimate for the computer - although everyone who has bought a computer knows that information from an old computer has to be transferred to the new computer and that setting up a new system takes time.

Summing up, I have used some of the Supervisor's budget for an efficient, updated computer that makes my work as Supervisor more productive so that I can better serve the people of Stanford. The estimate from our professional consultant is that it will last at least a good ten to twelve years.

Since running for office I have said that I would ensure that taxpayers' monies were spent wisely and carefully. I have attended meetings of Supervisors and Mayors without asking the taxpayers to pay for them. I have attended Office of the State Comptroller trainings on managing town finances without asking the taxpayers to pay for them. I have not taken a raise for two years. During my tenure as Supervisor, I have saved the town much more than the cost of the computer and its installation.

The Republicans have no reasonable argument against the purchase of a new computer system for your Supervisor except a case fueled by partisan politics.

Videos of Town Board Meetings are always available on
www.stanford4all.org
Town of Stanford's official website is townofstanford.org

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