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ELECTION 2021: Seneca Falls Town Board election could determine future of landfill

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Oct 30, 2021



Seneca Meadows Inc. operates the state's largest landfill along Route 414 in Seneca Falls.
Spencer Tulis file photo / Finger Lakes Times



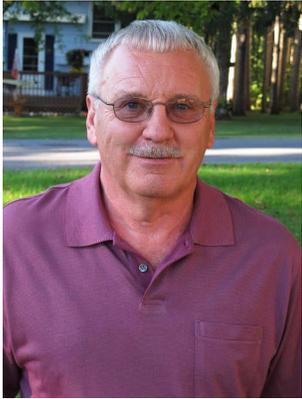
Avery

SENECA FALLS — The Town Board has worked with 3-2 party majorities since 2016. The defining issue that has made each vote critical is Seneca Meadows Inc., the state's largest landfill.

In 2016, a 3-2 vote resulted in approval of Local Law 3-2016, which calls for the closure of the Route 414 landfill by the end of 2025.

In 2017, a new 3-2 majority adopted Local Law 2-2017, rescinding Local Law 3-2016. However, Local Law 2-2017 was annulled later that year for a violation of the State Environmental Quality Review process, restoring Local Law 3-2016.

SMI continues to challenge Local Law 3-2016 in court.



DeLelys

At one point, SMI offered the town an enhanced Host Community Agreement, and agreed to drop its legal challenge, in exchange for allowing the landfill to operate until 2037. The town declined.



Sinicropi

As has become the case often in this Seneca County community, Tuesday's election for two of the five Town Board seats almost mirrors a referendum on the landfill.

Incumbent Democrats Doug Avery and Dave DeLelys are facing challenges from Republicans Frank Sinicropi and Kaitlyn Laskoski for four-year terms.



Laskoski

The candidates were asked to answer several questions. Here are their responses:

As an incumbent, what can you point to as accomplishments since taking office?

EVERY: I am immersed in every aspect of town government. There was a learning curve about some things, particularly highway, and water and sewer. I have made it my point to learn what I need to know. I proudly represent the town on the Heritage Area Commission, the Seneca Falls Development Corp. and the Waste Management Advisory Committee. I'm proud to have been part of the effort to commit serious resources to our infrastructure. While we come at it from different directions, the board as a whole sees the need to prove that we can survive and thrive without using landfill money to pay for operating expenses. I'm proud of the small role I played in the effort to secure the \$10 million DRI grant, which should be a real boost to downtown.

DeLELYS: I am the longest serving board member with 10 years of service with the village and town boards. I have been on all board committees and feel I have knowledge of any issues facing the town. Regarding accomplishments, it is a combined effort when you are part of a five-member board. During my tenure, I have seen the restoration of the bandstand at People's Park, securing the DRI grant, and getting Local Law 3 of 2016 on the books. I regularly meet with department heads and office personnel to see if they have concerns the town should address. I believe my voting record speaks for itself as it relates to accomplishments.

Doug Avery

Age: 66

Address: 54 Cayuga St.

Party lines: Democrat, Serving Seneca

Family: Wife, Susan

Education: Eastman School of Music, 1976; master's in music from Ithaca College, 1982

Work history: Retired in 2011 as vocal and choral music and theater teacher for Seneca Falls school district

Dave DeLelys

Age: 74

Address: 8 Pinehurst Drive

Party lines: Democrat,
Serving SenecaFamily: Wife, Jean; son,
DavidEducation: High school
general equivalency diplomaWork history: Retired after 43
years at Goulds Pumps; also
worked six years as a nuclear
weapons warhead assembler**As a challenger, do you take issue with the job done by the two incumbents? If so, what are they?**

SINICROPI: If elected, I will look at all the services provided by the town and support those functions. I am not a one-issue candidate. There are many things in the community needing to be done besides closing businesses that support our community with jobs and contributions to our revenue by paying taxes and a strong host agreement that, if used properly, can benefit the community for years to come.

LASKOSKI: Yes. It was not until election time and disclosure of my platform did my opponents start campaigning on multiple issues. For too long, one issue has been the focus, which is the closing of Seneca Meadows in 2025. Subsequently, multiple issues have been left unaddressed while both have been in office. Examples are the crumbling infrastructure, empty storefronts, depleting graduating classes, and threat of tax hikes. The lack of planning for a multi-year fiscal plan has left people questioning how hard they have been working outside of the scheduled board meetings. I also take issue with my opponents voting to accept 3% pay increases for board members when we cut expenses for the 2022 budget.

Do you support Local Law 3 of 2016 and its defense from legal challenges from SMI? Why or why not?

SINICROPI: I support all businesses in the community providing they follow the rules and regulations set forth by the state and federal governments. I am not in favor of closing businesses that follow the rules and regulation by using the authority of passing local laws by Town Boards to close any business. Article 4 of the state Constitution authorizes local governments to pass local laws, but not if they are inconsistent with the state Constitution. Do you need to spend thousands of dollars defending something that is contrary to the state Constitution? I would work on planning for the closure of the landfill at some time in the future and ask where will our trash go and how much will it cost.

Kaitlyn Laskoski

Age: 35

Address: 59 Cayuga St.

Party lines: Republican,
ConservativeFamily: Husband, Luke; two
stepsons, a daughter and a
sonEducation: Finger Lakes
Community College, 2006;
undergraduate degree in
psychology, St. John Fisher
College, 2008; master's from
St. John Fisher, 2010Work history: Employed by
Seneca County sheriff's office
since 2012, currently as a
senior mental health clinical
therapist; worked for Wayne
Behavioral Health Network at
the Wayne County
Correctional Facility from
2010-12**Frank Sinicropi**

Age: 71

Address: 2423 Lower Lake
RoadParty lines: Republican,
ConservativeFamily: Daughter Jessica, son
Michael.

Education: Associate degree in social science and humanities from Corning Community College; undergraduate degree in economics from SUNY Oswego

Work history: Worked for Seneca County for 47 years, full and part-time, including 33 years as personnel officer and four years as county treasurer

Voting day

Seneca Falls residents who are registered voters can vote in person on Election Day (Tuesday) by visiting the polling location in their district (Seneca Falls Community Center for Districts, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8; Seneca Falls Library for District 2; and Bridgeport Fire District for District 7). Polls are open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

LASKOSKI: I find it concerning that the current board is using a local law to shut down a law-abiding business that complies with all state and federal regulations and employs fellow community members. The idea of having our Town Board strong-arm businesses to shut down because they don't like them without statistical data to support it is alarming. Neither of my opponents have taken the time to go to Seneca Meadows to learn more about their day-to-day operations. These two have been set against working with local businesses, as evident by their track record.

AVERY: Yes. At my core, I believe that our town can and should thrive without a commercial landfill within our borders. Although the financial benefits have been considerable over the years, the drawbacks are too great to ignore going forward. Most of the trash that comes here is not our trash. If there was no money, it would never be allowed to happen. I'm a firm believer in the concept of home rule. We have been assured that a local law such as this is the final word in the matter. We have been assured that no state agency is going to swoop in at the last minute and force us to allow the landfill to continue against our wishes.

DeLELYS: Yes. I am one of those who voted for the local law. SMI will ultimately lose this fight. The DEC, the state Attorney General and our former State Senator have confirmed that as long as the law is on the books, the state cannot come in and require the landfill to remain in place. If I get elected, the law will stay on the books. Kaitlyn and Frank should be asked why they are spending so much time with landfill representatives to help them with this election. SMI is the furthest thing from a valued partner and trusted neighbor. Enough is enough. I want tourism, not trash.

How should the town prepare for the closing of Seneca Meadows in the future and the loss of \$3 million in annual revenue?

LASKOSKI: I am proposing a new host agreement that would hold Waste Connections accountable in the area of an independent odor detection system, a plan to remove organics from the solid waste, trucks using the 318 bypass instead of downtown Seneca Falls, a

guaranteed contribution on Jan. 1 not related to solid waste tonnage, installation of more gas wells, and increasing the amount of monies received related to the host agreement.

AVERY: The challenge will be to make sure our infrastructure is in the best possible shape when the landfill closes in 2025 and to put away money for the future while we're still receiving landfill revenue. Careful budgeting, close examination of our workforce size, a more aggressive approach to grant funding, and careful use of the resources we have set aside will allow us to move into the future with confidence.

DeLELYS: We have been weaning off the landfill money every year and will continue to do so while, at the same time, keeping taxes low. This is possible. We have proved it and will continue to do so. Only about \$1 million of the \$3 million is in the operating budget. At the time of the landfill closure, there will be more than \$14 million in reserves. The plan works and taxes have gone down each of the past three years while weaning the budget off landfill revenue. We already pay Cardinal Disposal for trash removal. They will most likely continue to contract with the town to remove garbage, and that will not affect the tax base.

SINICROPI: I support a new host agreement for the town and negotiating more money for the town. The landfill can afford that. I would also negotiate an agreement with the landfill for better odor controls, giving them a town permit each year and holding their feet to the fire if there are violations. They can do better, and I am sure the board can do better, with open communication with them and not having the attitude of the town vs. the landfill. I will look at the tax rate to keep it flat or reduced, whenever possible, by using other revenue to the town.

What are three other major issues facing the town, other than the landfill, are how do you propose dealing with them?

AVERY: First, our aging infrastructure. In the last four years we have put considerable resources in improvements to our water plant and distribution system. We have increased the number of roads paved each summer, replaced a network of sidewalks around Stanton and Knight schools. Second, finding the best way for increased

economic development, particularly on Fall Street. Our future lies with tourism, and our town could be an even more attractive destination for travelers. Third, the DRI grant should also open the door for other grant and loan opportunities for the town and small businesses.

DeLELYS: The Benton Pond on Bayard Street. It is the state's responsibility, and they should foot the bill for repairs. New sewer and water projects, such as the new sewer line from Kingdom Road down West Bayard. The DRI. We need to do all we can to get the projects the DRI grant will fund rolling along smoothly.

SINICROPI: We need to take care of our roads and infrastructure. We need to feel safe in our town. We need water and sewer and recreational activities for our youth and adults. If in the future cuts need to be made, let it be through attrition, providing it doesn't negatively affect most of the community. Police protection is important. The trimming of high insurance costs for employees.

LASKOSKI: Crumbling infrastructure, looming tax increases without a multi-year plan, and working cohesively on matters prior to the board meetings so they are more productive.

Does the town need a professional town manager? Why or why not?

DeLELYS: No. I think we have been doing fine all of these years with the supervisor and department heads doing a great job. After benefits are considered, this position would cost taxpayers an additional \$150,000 or more. I have regularly heard from residents that we do not need one. I stand by our taxpayers and residents.

SINICROPI: Yes, I do support the concept of a full-time town manager. A person at the helm of this organization can help with everyday running of the town and solve many small problems before they become something big so we don't have to use expensive lawyers to solve everyday problems. A manager would have no political agenda and focus on what is best for our town. No matter how the compensation, he or she would save money in the long run.

LASKOSKI: Yes. The former village of Seneca Falls had one. The village of Waterloo has one. The town of Seneca Falls is four times larger. It would bring consistency and enhance the day-to-day operations of the town's business.

AVERY: I don't think this is the time for that. The principal account clerk and the water and sewer clerks are responsible for all the water and sewer billing and tasking, as well as the town budget, accounts payable, human resources, payroll and other functions. A more crucial need right now is to take steps to ensure that this office is fully staffed through the transition as the principal account clerk moves toward retirement. If, after that, there is a sense a town manager might be required, I will certainly consider it.

Is the town heading in the right direction? Why or why not?

AVERY: I think we are, but we are also at a crossroads. We're making progress on infrastructure and budgeting matters. In spite of our differences, the board is making decisions that are in the best interests of the town. The DRI is going to provide a critical shot in the arm to downtown. The question is what happens now. On one hand is a future that is free of the landfill. Money may be a little tighter, but the air is clean, the trucks are gone and our tourist industry is thriving. On the other hand is a future where money is flowing freely, but to get it, we have to be the Northeast garbage dump. To me, the choice is an easy one.

DeLELYS: Yes, we are. The DRI will revitalize downtown, help small businesses with low-interest loans and incentives. Local Law 3 stays in place and SMI will close in 2025. Plans to fix water and sewer lines. We are on the right track. The valued partners and trusted neighbors in our community are our hardworking residents who care about our future, not a mega-billion-dollar corporation who is trying to buy our town.

LASKOSKI: At this time, I do not feel we are heading in the right direction. I am appalled at the disregard for the community's infrastructure by my opponents. Suffice it to say our infrastructure has been grossly neglected at the community's expense. There are looming tax hikes. Attention to these matters should be a priority and not focusing on the single issue of closing the landfill. Priorities are misplaced.

SINICROPI: Did not provide a specific answer to this question.