

Constituent Connection

District 5



Tuesday, November 3, 2009
(Election Day Edition)

Dear Constituent:

In just a few hours, polling locations throughout the city of Troy will be open, and you will once again have the opportunity to decide who will represent your interests on the City Council, as well as on the County Legislature, Supreme Court, County Court, and Family Court.

I am currently running for re-election to represent the 5th District of Troy, and I humbly ask for your vote. On the ballot, I can be found at the far end of Row A, the Democratic row. In addition, I would appreciate your consideration in electing my fellow Democratic colleagues on Row A:

- Supreme Court: Jim Gilpatric
- County Court: Andy Ceresia
- Family Court: Beth Walsh
- County Legislators: Lou Rosamilia, Peter Ryan, Mark Fleming, Ed Manny, Peter Grimm, Kathleen Cassidy
- City Council At-Large: Clem Campana, John Brown, Mike LoPorto

I am proud to be running with such a distinguished group of citizens, and look forward to working with all of them to address the issues that we face at the city and county levels.

Polls are open from 6:00am until 9:00pm. For District 5, your possible polling locations are: Italian Community Center (ED30), the Osgood Firehouse (ED31&32), Carroll Hill School (ED33&34), School 16 (ED35&36), and the Pawling Ave. Methodist Church (ED37). If you are unsure which polling location is yours, please call me at 272-4553 or e-mail me at zalewski4troy@gmail.com.

As I approach the end of my first term as an elected official, I would like to offer some reflections on my experience so far, and my plans going forward. If I have kept your attention until this point, I hope you will find the remainder of this letter enlightening.

The last two years have gone by in a flash. It seems like only yesterday that I was recruiting volunteers for my first-ever campaign, reaching out to neighborhood leaders and community activists, obtaining signatures to get on the ballot, raising funds, and walking door-to-door on every street throughout the district. My goal was simple: To talk with you about the challenges that we face and the opportunities that we have as citizens of Troy.

As you might remember, I took notes on every conversation that I had, and promised that I would work to address the issues that were important to you. Your concerns are my concerns, and I have worked every day since then to try to find solutions that will address these issues – making our streets cleaner and our neighborhoods safer, keeping our tax burden low, holding public officials accountable to high ethical standards, and building our local economy.

Outlined below are some of the actions, initiatives, and laws that I have spearheaded during my first term on the City Council.

Landlord Registry and “Mini-Dorm” Moratorium

One of the most pressing issues in our City, including many areas in District 5, is the plague of negligent, absentee landlords that infest our neighborhoods and decrease our property values and quality of life. The Democratic majority is actively engaged in a multi-phase project to combat this problem. The first phase of this project was the creation of a Landlord Registry, a law which I drafted and sponsored, after researching similar laws in other municipalities.

As chairman of the Planning Committee, I held a series of public hearings to solicit input from residents and to openly debate the details of the legislation. The resulting Landlord Registry law – the first of its kind in Troy – is our initial step toward making landlords accountable for the properties that they own.

Closely related to the absentee landlord problem is the so-called “mini-dorm” dilemma – a troubling practice where landlords subdivide a property into excessive units and/or bedrooms in an attempt to pack as many renters (typically college students) into the building as possible, causing parking problems, safety concerns, and quality of life issues.

Councilman John Brown and myself sponsored legislation to place a moratorium on subdividing a residential building into additional units, and on increasing the number of bedrooms in a unit within the existing structure, in order to put a temporary halt to this trend, and to allow the city to explore updated zoning alternatives. During the moratorium, Troy Architecture Program has been examining this problem in an attempt to submit new zoning laws for our consideration. The moratorium was renewed in September, 2009, while new zoning laws are being reviewed.

Increased Public Input and Community Responsiveness

Upon taking office, one of the first laws passed by the new Democratic majority increased the time that a citizen can speak at a Council meeting from five minutes to ten minutes. In addition, we removed the restriction that a speaker could only comment on agenda items.

I began a practice of allowing public comment during Planning Committee meetings, which has now been adopted by other committee chairs. As a result of this renewed emphasis on public input and citizen-driven legislation, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in attendance at many committee meetings.

Public hearings are not the only place where I have solicited your input. My e-mail inbox has received over 3,000 constituent letters, and I have fielded dozens of phone calls and letters from concerned citizens. Whether it be neighborhood issues – garbage, noise, speeding traffic, street conditions, and so on – or citywide issues such as the closing of the Troy Public Library, the shutdown of the Sanctuary for Independent Media, the City Hall site planning, the Proctors redevelopment, the sale of the Dauchy Building, or most recently, the Mayor's refusal of \$845,000 in stimulus funds, I have listened to your ideas and suggestions, responded in a timely manner, and done my best to represent your interests in city government.

One of my campaign mottoes from two years ago was “Your voice on the Troy City Council”. I am proud to say that I have followed through in making that happen.

Neighborhood Improvement and Public Safety

It is my belief that the restoration and rehabilitation of our neighborhoods is a core component of the revitalization of our city. Achieving that goal requires personal involvement and financial investment from both the community and city leaders.

I have made neighborhood involvement and activism a cornerstone of my political agenda, and regularly attend

neighborhood meetings in Little Italy, Osgood, and the Eastside. I have fought hard to acquire CDBG and Neighborhood Improvement funding for a multitude of neighborhood projects, including improvements to the Little Italy Marketplace, painting and anti-graffiti programs, street and sidewalk enhancements, landscaping, Spring Little League field cleanup, the 5th Ward War Memorial beautification, the new School 16 playground, and the soon-to-be Kinloch Park dog park.

While these neighborhood projects help to build community and create a positive living environment for everyone who resides in the area, they cannot alone provide the safety that we demand for ourselves and our families. I have been working closely with our Community Policing Unit, responding to your requests, passing information on, and utilizing community organizing technologies such as i-Neighbors in order to empower all of us to become partners with our police force. I am currently working with a group of students at RPI who have developed a product called Safer Neighborhoods that may revolutionize our implementation of Neighborhood Watch. In addition, my colleagues and I continue to encourage neighborhoods to form community groups and Neighborhood Watch organizations. It is my hope that by this time next year, the Hillview Heights Neighborhood Watch will be up and running.

Cleaning Up Troy City Government

Some people joke that politics in Rensselaer County, and Troy in particular, is a bloodsport. In many cases, reasonable public debate has been replaced by continual personal and political attacks, with the goal of discrediting opponents and silencing any dissent.

The current administration has adopted a “governance by press release” strategy, rather than working to foster productive relationships with its co-equal branch of government. Troy's citizens have been unfairly intimidated by certain members of the administration, and the Mayor refuses to hold anyone accountable for their actions. Words such as “retaliation” and “retribution” have become commonplace in our city vocabulary. As a result, Troy receives an inordinate amount of negative publicity, where the focus is on the dysfunction in city government, rather than the positive steps that we are taking to make Troy a better place to live.

Two years ago, I launched my campaign on a platform of reform and integrity. I will continue to strive to meet the highest ethical standards, and I will demand the same from both my colleagues on the Council and members of the administration. The days of politics by intimidation, pioneered by folks like Bob Mirch and left unchecked by the Republican administration, are drawing to a close. The “old boys” network is disintegrating, and I look forward to being a part of a renewed government that **always** has the interests of Troy's citizens in mind.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is still much work to be done in our city. I am proud of the number of accomplishments that I, along with my Democratic colleagues, have had in our first term serving you. I look forward to building upon our achievements, learning from our mistakes, and continuing to represent you to the best of my ability.

Sincerely,



Ken Zalewski
Councilman, District 5