

## Tensions Boil Over at Raucous Conesville Meeting

By Timothy Knight

Following the unauthorized of an independent town website in Conesville after political content posted there, tensions boiled over at last week's Conesville Town Board meeting.

During public comments before the town board, resident Fred Ruckel, who administers conesvilleny.com, accused Town Supervisor Bill Federice of violating his First Amendment rights by requesting that content promoting the US Climate Alliance be censored.

"Supervisor Federice insisted that we censor our content as he felt it did not reflect the views of our town," said Ruckel, who spoke extensively on the topic of climate change and how it's affecting the planet.

Protesting the supervisor's decision to unauthorized the website, Ruckel stated "The Conesville website is a local resource for the people, by the people. It's not under governmental control or influence."

In response to Ruckel's statement, Supervisor Federice replied "What you fail to say is that you imply that this is the Town of Conesville website."

The website, which was created in 2014 by Ruckel with Federice's support, features a "Town of Conesville" graphic on the top-left portion of the homepage and highlights local information. It doesn't state until the footer of the site that it is inde-

pendently owned and operated.

Commenting that he didn't really care whether Ruckel had an opinion one way or the other on climate change posted on the site, Federice stated "So what I just did was ask you to please make it known that those are your opinions and I'm good with it, but you weren't!"

Federice then accused Ruckel of going on a political tirade in a private phone call they were having on the subject, during which Ruckel allegedly smeared the township of being nothing but red-necks.

Ruckel adamantly denied making the statement, while resident Joanne Noone accused Federice of smearing her in the past with similar accusations. Noone ran against Federice in 2013 for Town Supervisor, losing by a two-to-one margin.

As the proceedings descended into chaos and crosstalk, Federice attempted to gain order by pounding the table and demanding that people talk one at a time, prompting Noone to loudly state, "You're a dictator."

Although the situation was defused after Noone's remark, tensions remained high throughout the remainder of the meeting.

In other business, the Conesville town board:

• Heard that the exterior of the old Conesville Firehouse is in extremely rough shape. Presented

to the town board as part of a study on the structure, consultant Dan Wilson said that both the roof and siding need to be replaced, but that "It's structurally in fine shape and it could be used again if you wanted to." Several ideas were discussed on what to do moving forward on the project, but no decisions were made.

• Heard from resident Lorelei Zuniga that she is opposed to the proposed West Conesville Wastewater Supply project being on her property. Requesting that the Town of Conesville pass a resolution that would exempt her property from receiving any consideration of eminent domain for the project, Zuniga's request was supported by Councilman Paul Tubiolo. According to Lamont Engineering consultant Chris Yacobucci, who was present at the meeting, her property is currently not part of the project's schematic. No action was taken by the town board.

• Voted unanimously to approve a resolution authorizing the municipality's continued involvement in the West Conesville Wastewater Supply project. Supervisor Federice cautioned that the township still retains the right to opt out of the project at any point during the pre-construction phase and that residents in West Conesville will have the right to approve or disapprove the project in a municipal referendum.

## EXCLUSIVE: LARAWAY SEEKS ASSEMBLY SEAT



By Matthew Avitabile

Middleburgh Central School history teacher and animal rescuer Wesley Laraway announced his interest in the New York State Assembly seat vacated by Peter Lopez. Lopez left his seat last week to become a regional EPA Administrator.

Laraway is entering his 23rd year teaching at Middleburgh, where he graduated from high school as President of the Student Council. He is also a graduate of SUNY Oneonta, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in History and Master's Degree in Reading Education. He is the founder and operator of Red Maple Farm, a non-profit that rescues animals of all shapes and sizes.

The candidate said that a run has been on his mind for about two years - since Assemblyman Lopez launched his abortive Congressional campaign in 2015. "I would not run against Pete," he said. Laraway said that he is running as a Republican but is seeking a wide base of support. "I am running for all Americans that live in Upstate." He stated that he dislikes the partisan divide that splits

state and national politics.

For the candidate, he believes that his campaign is one that can "put public good and integrity back into politics." He plans a positive campaign and will not take a cent from special interest groups. "I am not going to spend six figures on my campaign." He added, "I own one suit- don't worry, I will wear it when I vote for you in Albany."

For Laraway, the choice to run is a personal one, saying, "one of my mottos has always been, leave the world a better place that you found it." He said young people have "the cards stacked against them," with difficulty finding a livable wage and facing a lower standard of living than their parents. "I will do what is right even if it is unpopular."

The candidate stated that he had several major reasons to run. Among them is a desire to be an advocate for farmers and for better education across the district. He is also a staunch opponent of fracking and pipelines in the district.

His platform is largely divided into three main fields. First is rural technology and infrastructure,

calling for district-wide cell and internet coverage. Second is protection and promotion of farmers, including the Right to Farm. He promised: "if it is bad for farmers I will vote no, if it is good for farmers I will vote yes." Lastly, he hopes to use his experience in education to build "skill-based vocational options" including for future skilled and manual labor employment.

Laraway cites years of experience in various organizations in his decision to run. These include as a past President of Middleburgh's Rotary, an Eagle Scout, a former Elks Teenager of the Year, an exchange student to Brazil, as a local historian, and in animal rescue--one of the largest such facilities in the Northeast. In 2016, the Schoharie County Chamber of Commerce presented Laraway with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The same year he received the NY State Humane Society Hero of the Year Award.

Laraway is humble about his background. His wife Darcy is also a teacher at Middleburgh and raised three children. For the first time in August, he said, he and Darcy became grandparents. Should he be elected, Laraway would retire from the school and Darcy would continue teaching.

The course of the election is in the hands of Governor Andrew Cuomo. Cuomo may choose either a March or June special election. If done in March, county party committees will choose candidates. If in June, the candidates will be selected by primary. No other candidates have announced plans to run as of yet. Lopez cannot endorse in the primary or general election under the Hatch Act, which forbids federal employees from being involved in politics.

Laraway hasn't formally launched his campaign and is planning a formal kickoff for a later date. However, he is clear about his desire to make things better for the region.

"I want to run a true grassroots campaign. I will gladly take your support and your vote and it won't cost either one of us a dime. I will not let you or our kids down."

## Birches Receives Final Inspection Next Hearing Scheduled for Nov 9th

By Matthew Avitabile

The long Birches saga took yet another turn this week as the troubled project received its final inspection for opening. Schoharie Village Code Enforcement Officer Lloyd Stannard said that the Certificate of Occupancy will likely be issued this week, as well.

It is yet unclear when

or if residents will be moving in anytime soon. Job listings on Monster.com under Rondout Property Management LLC are seeking to hire both an Apartment Community Manager and Apartment Maintenance worker/caretaker.

Clearer still, is the next scheduled court hearing between developer Steve

Aaron and project partner Bank of America. The Bank is seeking control of the project, which is currently almost two and a half years late for opening. The last several hearings resulted in no major progress. This next hearing is November 9th at 10am at the Ulster County Courthouse in Kingston. We'll be there covering.

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