

Fetzer Seeks Newtown's First Selectman Spot

By: Linda Zukauskas 10/31/2009



Democrat Gary Fetzer is running for first selectman in Newtown in the November 3 municipal election.

NEWTOWN - Gary Fetzer, Democrat, wants voters to elect him as first selectman on November 3, because he feels the town has the ability to create a model community that showcases the results of working together.

Mr. Fetzer has 20 years of experience as the Director of Communications for various large colleges, healthcare and financial institutions. He also spent eight years on the Newtown Board of Selectman from 1989-1997.

Currently, he is professor of political science at the University of New Haven.

His campaign slogan is Team Newtown. It refers to a spirit of working together and asking those whom have yet to be asked to bring their expertise to a volunteer effort in support of the town.

They're excited to get new volunteers involved, saying they've collected a database of people who could volunteer skills for the town. They want to see fresh results with fresh volunteers and that's what Team Newtown is all about.

He thinks Newtown's boards, commissions and volunteers are divided and he would like to unite them. He considers himself uniquely qualified to lead because he can bridge the gap between those who support education and those who think education receives too many resources.

His running mate, Joe Hemingway, has spent many hours volunteering for the town, working on the Economic Development Commission and Legislative Council.

They've knocked on over 7,000 doors since June and heard voters say they don't want tax increases, especially until the economy picks back up. It's a difficult task to balance that need with Newtown's obligation to educate its youth.

They feel they can improve the situation by improving communications between boards and taxpayers, clearly identifying where money is going on both the town and school sides of the budget.

Mr. Hemingway said a strong school system is the backbone of a community and, at the end of the day, it is one budget.

Mr. Fetzter said the First Selectman sits on all boards and he intends to use this privilege to act as a bridge between the town and school system, communicating with people and identifying ways to cut costs.

He also wants a representative from every board and commission to meet on a regular basis, get on the same page and reduce duplication of efforts. He sees this as the first step toward long term planning.

Mr. Fetzter sees the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as a wish list and thinks the town needs to take a hard look at it and find a way to effectively prioritize items on it.

He wants to create an effective way to evaluate the need for school improvements against the need for a new police or fire station.

Mr. Hemingway said the CIP process is a good one but people need to understand it's a plan. He thinks people assume approval of the CIP translates to approval for individual projects listed in the CIP and that is a mistake.

He gave the example of a bandshell at Fairfield Hills. While this is a good idea and could be used to attract tourists because Newtown is a good location to draw celebrity performers, he would like to see it pushed off a year.

Mr. Fetzter and Mr. Hemingway want to revisit the master plan for Fairfield Hills and move forward with the demolition of unusable buildings as a priority. Mr. Hemingway noted the costs to the town in terms of securing the old buildings and covering the town's liability should anyone be hurt inside of one.

Mr. Fetzter would like to see private money used on the campus but, first, he wants voters to define the look and purpose of it. There are many choices: open space, ball fields, minor commercial development, major commercial development, minor residential development, major residential development, etc.

They spoke of the need for affordable housing, saying children who grew up in Newtown cannot afford to return after college. One suggestion they would consider is the renovation of some Fairfield Hills buildings with small shops in the lower level and apartments above.

They want to generate innovative ideas for economic development, perhaps using Sandy Hook as a tourist destination. It has good restaurants and trails that spread from the center, offering an attractive alternative for people who can't afford to travel to Vermont.

Mr. Fetzter said he will not rest until the hazardous waste station in Hawleyville has been removed. One of his first trips to Washington will be with the purpose of getting support from elected officials to make that area more appealing to residents and businesses.

The running mates said Edmond Town Hall is a good example of the potential for economic development. They propose using the building as a cultural arts center, providing a place for local artists to exhibit as well as a performance venue.

They said it's unclear who is responsible for the future of the building and returned to the theme of communications. To them, it's critical to talk with the various parties such as borough and town hall managers to get consensus on a direction.

Mr. Fetzter has lived in Newtown for 25 years. "My passion is to help people stay in this town, make the town better, and see what can be accomplished by working together."

Mr. Hemingway has been a Newtown resident for 20 years, married to Maribeth for 27 years with two daughters. He reminds people to get out and vote.

The presidential elections see more turnout than municipal elections, but the municipal will have more impact on the day to day lives of Newtown's citizens.