

As the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County was unable to schedule a candidate forum acceptable to both candidates for Rotterdam Supervisor, we posed five questions to the candidates. The candidates used their own discretion regarding the length of their replies.

Question 1

Over the next five years, what do you feel is the biggest challenge facing Rotterdam?

Answer: Clark A. Collins

One of the biggest challenges is controlling the operating expenses while still providing residents with services. This must be achieved while staying within a budget that complies with the states mandated tax cap.

Answer: John Polimeni

The Collins administration left a nearly \$2 million deficit; approximately \$1.4 million in expenses and more than \$500,000 in over-inflated revenue projections. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Collins administration did not submit the required financial statements and audits to New York State. Where was the transparency in any of the budgets and lack of audits by the Collins administration? This is why I have called for an investigative audit of the Town's financials and contracts by the New York State Comptroller and for an investigation by the New York State Attorney General.

In the 9 months I have been in office, the 2023 financial statements and audit have been submitted to New York State and the 2024 financial statements and audits will be submitted by the end of the year. Getting the 2025 and 2026 financial statements and audits submitted will be a priority in 2027. We are developing policy that will ensure that this level of financial malpractice cannot happen in the future.

Understanding where tax dollars go is also very important. For the typical property tax bill, 58% or slightly more goes to School Taxes, 22% are County Taxes, approximately 14.8% are Town Taxes, and about 5.1% are Highway Taxes. Therefore, the vast majority of property taxes are from the School Districts and the County, not the Town and Highway.

Rotterdam's greatest challenge is restoring long-term fiscal stability while continuing to deliver the reliable public services residents expect. The Town has inherited significant financial pressures, including expenses and obligations that were not adequately planned for in prior budgets. We must confront those realities honestly rather than shift costs into the future or conceal them through overly optimistic revenue projections.

At the same time, we must maintain public safety, invest in infrastructure, support our senior and youth services, and preserve the quality of life that makes Rotterdam a desirable place to live. My approach is straightforward: restore budget discipline, make responsible investments, seek

available grants and partnerships, and ensure taxpayers understand how their money is being spent. This will take time, but with transparency and sound planning, Rotterdam can rebuild a stable financial foundation.

Question 2

What is your perspective/position on land planning and business development for the Town of Rotterdam?

Answer: John Polimeni

Land planning and economic development must be deliberate, balanced, and guided by the interests of Rotterdam residents. We should encourage responsible business growth that expands the tax base, creates employment opportunities, and revitalizes underused commercial properties, without sacrificing the character of our neighborhoods, overburdening infrastructure, or placing unfair costs on taxpayers.

I support development that is consistent with our comprehensive plan, appropriate zoning, environmental protection, and public input. Rotterdam should prioritize the redevelopment of existing commercial corridors and vacant or underutilized properties before pursuing unnecessary sprawl. We must also make it easier for small businesses and local entrepreneurs to invest here by providing clear processes, predictable regulations, and a Town government that acts as a partner rather than an obstacle.

Development should serve the whole community: residents, small businesses, families, seniors, and future generations.

Answer: Clark A. Collins

We need to follow the comprehensive plan and work on street-scaping which will eliminate spot zoning and preserve the character of Rotterdam.

Question 3

As Town Supervisor, what new initiatives, both short term and long term, would you like to implement?

Answer: Clark A. Collins

In the short term I will make sure that the improvements of the wastewater treatment plant and our water distribution system continue. For the long term I believe that we need a water tank in the Schalmont school district to provide adequate water pressure for the residents and future development, both residential and commercial. We also have to look at the possibility of building a new highway garage and police station.

Answer: John Polimeni

In the short term, my priorities are restoring fiscal accountability, protecting essential public services, and ensuring that residents receive timely and respectful service from their local government. This includes careful review of expenditures, stronger budget planning, pursuit of grants, and clear public communication about the Town's financial position and major projects.

I also want to continue expanding community-centered services. Recent efforts such as enhancing activities at the Senior Center, building the Rotterdam Commons park, and focusing on recruiting new businesses to town reflect the kind of practical partnerships that can directly improve residents' lives.

Over the long term, I want Rotterdam to have a sustainable financial plan; well-maintained roads, parks, and public facilities; responsible redevelopment along key commercial corridors; attracting new housing developments; and a government that plans ahead rather than reacting to crises. I also support initiatives that strengthen support for veterans, seniors, working families, and young people, while preserving Rotterdam as a safe and welcoming community.

Question 4

Can you describe progress made on any one of the goals outlined in the comprehensive plan adopted in December 2022?

Answer: John Polimeni

One important goal of the 2022 comprehensive plan is strengthening community amenities and improving the quality of life for residents of all ages. Progress toward that goal can be seen in the Town's continued investment in the Rotterdam Senior Center and its programming. We have added programming to the Senior Center; it now has at least 31 programs for seniors. For example, the addition of bocce courts expands recreational opportunities, encourages physical activity and social connection, and provides another reason for residents to participate in community life.

We have focused on quality-of-life issues as well. Efforts to address code enforcement issues and vacant housing have been a central point of emphasis. Both of these directly impact quality-of-life.

The Town has also pursued partnerships that address practical needs, including collaboration with the Rotterdam Community Center on a mobile food pantry at Mohonasen Schools. These efforts demonstrate that implementing a comprehensive plan is not limited to large construction projects. It also means building partnerships, improving access to services, and creating a stronger sense of community.

Answer: Clark A. Collins

The town has started the Natural Resource Inventory which was outlined in the comprehensive plan. We should also apply for any grants which will address the Multi Model Study of Curry Road.

Question 5

How do you intend to address the need for more Affordable Housing in the Town of Rotterdam?

Answer: Clark A. Collins

I have been on the Planning Commission for many years and have yet to see a builder come before us regarding affordable housing. I would like to seek federal and state grants that may provide incentive for local contractors to build affordable housing.

Answer: John Polimeni

Housing prices, to some extent, have increased from institutional and investment banking. We are currently working on policy that would limit the ability of institutional and investment banks to purchase housing in the town that prevent young and working families from purchasing homes. Additionally, we are working with housing agencies to try to create a program to assist with financial planning, down payments, and other financing issues related to purchasing a home.

Rotterdam needs housing options that allow seniors to age in place, enable young families and working people to remain in the community, and provide stable homes for residents. Addressing housing needs requires thoughtful planning, not one-size-fits-all development. Additionally, a housing policy will enable the town to grow its tax base while maintaining a good quality of life.

I support encouraging a mix of housing types in appropriate locations, including senior housing, workforce housing, rehabilitation of vacant or underused properties, and carefully planned mixed-use development near existing infrastructure and services. The Town should work with responsible developers, nonprofit organizations, and county and state partners to identify grants, incentives, and redevelopment opportunities.

Projects should fit the surrounding community, include adequate infrastructure and public safety planning, and involve meaningful public input. Our goal should be to create housing opportunities that are safe, well maintained, and beneficial to the entire Town.