

Guest Columnist Quaverly Rothenberg: A councilor who believes in you

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It's become almost a sport in Northampton establishment politics to try and distract you with my supposed shortcomings. I'm painted as "divisive," a "problem," upsetting some imaginary polite and perfect status quo. I'm "mean" or "a bully," "getting in the way" of progressive democracy. So much time and effort is spent manufacturing this caricature of me.

I'd like to focus instead on facts, which are that the people of Northampton are being denied the following things: staffing and resources for schools; proper and timely maintenance of roads and sidewalks; a thriving downtown; an affordable city; and a responsive, transparent government — a government that doesn't just talk about care and equity but demonstrates it in their choices.

With such obvious and looming issues, it's not surprising that establishment politicians would rather talk about me. But here's the truth: Northampton has \$30 million in savings right now, more than enough to attend to our most pressing concerns and leave an emergency cushion. Last year, the state certified an additional \$11.7 million in unspent "extra" cash; this year's forecast is similar. Yet despite the need for a mere \$2.7 million to adequately fund our schools, we didn't.

And it didn't matter that the state told us our standards and outcomes in things like literacy were violating the law. Our local government sat on the money anyway. It also never matters that our sidewalks and roads are crumbling or that even the iconic walking bridge over Main Street is in such disrepair that the holes in the rotted wood go straight through to street level. We let people walk and ride bikes over that path every day, apparently unconcerned with public health or safety.

When I ask local officials to explain why, against all common sense, they make such decisions, or why they won't let me see the books, the "Noho" political establishment decides to distract the public from wanting those answers by inventing new concerns you could have about my tone. You can call me anytime and check my tone; my number is (925) 999-0990. You'd probably be surprised at the sweet person you'll find, ready to connect you with exactly the people you need to make progress on your goals, immediately rolling up her sleeves and working alongside you. But if we never meet — and I hope we do — here's me, in my own words:

I have one job, and it's to represent the people of Ward 3, their many viewpoints and needs. I am open to the public seven days a week and surround myself with experts to fact-check city management. I bring an open mind to my role and listen to what my constituents say they need. The only personal viewpoints I bring with me are that I don't tolerate abuses of power, I don't validate unwarranted entitlement, and I believe in prioritizing based on need. And most importantly, I was raised to be unafraid of bullies, and I will never become one.

I see the public as the highest-ranking part of local government, because I trust your judgment. You don't need a small group to tell you what's best for you. You need public servants who will work for you. Instead of telling the public that they're unreasonable or uninformed, I work my very hardest to listen to you and find solutions to your problems. I voice your concerns and zealously advocate for you. Politicians don't have to lie, play games, or make backroom deals, so I don't. We can do the real work of democracy in Northampton; this is a spectacular community. And, truly, if not here, then where?

I envision a Northampton where we put the community's politics into action and change the system in ways that serve and respect the needs of the working class. It's an honor to work for you and with you, and I will continue to make whatever personal sacrifices are required to do that work with honor and integrity. Because of all of you making your voices heard, this is the most contested and consequential election we've had in decades. Please join me in casting your vote on Tuesday for candidates who believe in you.

Quaverly Rothenberg is Ward 3 city councilor in Northampton.