

Port Chester Historical Society Port Chester Trustee Candidates Questionnaire

Question 1: The Port Chester Historical Society's goal is to preserve Port Chester history and provide resources to educate the public. As a village trustee, how would you support and collaborate with the Port Chester Historical Society?

Mr. John Allen

Having an active and involved Historical Society adds to the character, flavor and desirability of our community. By supporting the Historical Society's efforts through access to resources and providing a platform to work with the BOT to address concerns where history intersects with today's interest, we can advocate for our village together, and use the systems in place to ensure all of Port Chester is respected and its many years of history is shared with the public. BOT meetings should have updates from the Historical Society so that concerns can be addressed early in the planning of upcoming development projects.

Ms. Juliana Alzate

Port Chester has a rich history that should be preserved for our future generations. As a trustee I would support and advocate for a Village Board or Commission for the Historical Society. Creating a Board/ Commission under the Village would allow for residents to voice their concerns and opinions regarding proposed development and/or revitalization projects.

The Historical Society should hold workshops and talks to encourage the preservation of records and photographs of Port Chester. They can share their research with Village Boards and Commissions as well as the public. I would collaborate with attending workshops and assisting with the community outreach to make the residents aware of the Historical Society and their mission.

Mr. Joseph Carvin

I could not find a mission statement on your website but hitting the "Learn More" button I came across this set of activities:

"Together, our Society investigates and shares its research on the history of Port Chester, Rye Brook and the Town of Rye, with the Village of Port Chester, are sponsoring the continued renovation, use, and preservation of the Bush-Lyon Homestead

Future plans include..."a colonial garden, creation of period rooms in the Bush-Lyon Homestead, community events and speakers. We invite you to... Visit the Bush-Lyon Homestead when tours are available".

As someone who as a third grader some 60 years ago visited the Bush-Lyon Homestead and had their essay selected to be read to the whole school, I am fully supportive of your exploration of our history and commend the wonderful work you do in this area.

As you will see in my answer to the next question, the very viability of our village is in question and one important solution is city-status. Understanding why the village of Port Chester was created can inform our challenges of today. The Historical Society can help shed light on the history leading up to Rye becoming a city and why FDR vetoed Port Chester's attempt to become a city. This kind of background would be extremely helpful in understanding our village's chances of securing city status today.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that the HISTORICAL SOCIETY's insertion of itself into the economic development debate is worrisome. That disconnect from the stated activities on your site is problematic. At a minimum that aim should be made clear as part of a formal mission statement ensuring that those activities are consistent with your mission and not-for-profit status.

Mr. Joseph DeVita

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Bart Didden

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Phil Dorazio

The preservation of our village's history is extremely important to me. As a lifelong resident of Port Chester and although only 51 years old, I often find myself in conversations with friends and family trying to remember what store or building was where or when did it close or when was it torn down. As a Village trustee I would

collaborate with the historical society by giving them access to any and all photos that may be in our village archives. I would make every effort to streamline any petitions or requests to access these archives and or files. I would like to see any and all repairs needed at the Bush-Lyon homestead are addressed immediately. I would also like to see this group recognized as a part of the village government, similar to the park commission. I would want to see a budget put in place to help with any costs in the preservation of our history.

Ms. Joan Grangenois-Thomas

Responding to this question while in the middle of Black History Month and while people are actively trying to suppress and outlaw history gives me pause. It goes without saying that I could do a lot more to support the Port Chester Historical Society. One way would be to have members present before the Board of Trustees, as many boards, committees and commissions do. Next is to encourage the PCHS to collaborate with other organizations in the community; Port Chester/Rye NAACP, Friends of the African American Cemetery, PC/RB Library, and One World, to name a few, if that hasn't already occurred.

Documenting history is not a passive activity. It requires constant outreach, collaboration, and finding creative ways to bring more people in. A great project might be to sponsor some sort of contest. Again, Black History Month is a great vehicle to make the connection not just about slavery, but about the contribution of people of African descent in the area.

Question 2: As a village trustee, how would you balance the preservation of our rich history with the interests/demands of developers?

Mr. John Allen

While there are buildings of historic merit that have deteriorated beyond where they could be rehabilitated and repurposed, facades could be maintained or replicated to maintain some of the outward appearance and character of buildings replaced by modern construction. I would work to foster collaboration between the Historic Preservation Board and the IDA, to provide incentives to developers to maintain historical features in new development. I would also like to revise the "glazing" and "voiding" requirements in the new zoning code, which require incredible amounts of plate glass windows, out of character with our charming, historical Main Street. To the extent that historical facades cannot be preserved, the Village should encourage and incentivize developers to plan stylistic elements that evoke the history of the removed buildings.

Ms. Juliana Alzate

In my opinion, the preservation of our rich history needs to be on par with the interests and demands of the developers. I also believe that preservation should not deter development from occurring.

The goals and needs of the Historical Society should be clearly defined to avoid overreach beyond their purpose. Communication with developers at early stages of design could be key to help the Planning Commission better take into account concerns of both parties and help develop ways to preserve the history of important historic buildings, including if significant, the building itself.

As trustee I would advocate for developers to present ideas during the design phase by receiving feedback from the Historical Society and the community. A community design charrette involving all stakeholders could be effective to help express sentiments of proposed projects.

Mr. Joseph Carvin

This question reflects a bias against developers that is unfair. It also reflects an inadvertent or willful refusal to address the challenges addressed by the independent report on city status that concludes that PC finances are at a breaking point and the very viability of our community is in question. The report makes clear that our village risks abandonment!!!!

The report is unequivocal the very existence of the village of Port Chester is at risk.

Wouldn't it be ironic if Port Chester's history comes to an end because of an over enthusiastic commitment to so-called historic buildings?

The question therefore should not be how to balance our rich history with the interests of developers the question should be how are you going to balance the need for financial stability and economic development so that Port Chester can continue to exist thereby extending our rich history?

My answer to that question is I will work hard to balance the interests of all segments of our community as we look to encourage development consistent with our history.

I am delighted to see the owner of 16-18 North Main Street revitalizing the iconic Mutual Trust Building that was achieved with the active support of the village.

I am also supportive of the effort to install as part of the form-based code negotiations an advisory Historic Commission which I understand will serve as a focal point for the honoring of our history.

Finally, I am also supportive of updating our Master Plan where all segments of our community will have an opportunity to opine on how we take development forward being sure to balance historic and current needs.

Mr. Joseph DeVita

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Bart Didden

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Phil Dorazio

The answer to this question is simple. I would DEMAND the preservation of the look and feel of a small town Main Street. This must be incorporated into any and all new developments. This is something that I am adamant about. Again growing up here I remember what Main Street was like in the 70's & 80's. My brothers and family go back further than that. I would like to see all new store fronts have their own individual appeal. No block long strip mall type store fronts. The architectural integrity of our past must be kept. I do not expect a mirror image of Main Street 1948, but I would oppose any development designs that are not based off the look and feel of our past. We can move forward while embracing past.

Ms. Joan Grangenois-Thomas

With support, the BOT can create a policy to require historic preservation be included as a prerequisite or as a condition to developers receiving payment in lieu of taxes in order to develop land which would require demolition of existing property. A closer adherence to recommendations from SHPO, could go a long way to retaining those buildings with historic relevance. Reconstituting the Architectural Review Board and seeking their input could be another check. We know that just because a building has historical relevance doesn't mean that it is in a condition to retain it. Unfortunately, many of the buildings, particularly in the downtown character district, have not been maintained. Gaining the insight of SHPO, ARB and perhaps outside consultants would provide a comprehensive review of the viability of retaining some of these buildings. When the village begins to support these approaches, developers will come to understand how important this is to the village and will prepare their own plans accordingly. But over the years, the village hasn't shown much respect for historical preservation and developers know that.

Question 3: Would you support the creation of a Historic Preservation Commission under a Certified Local Government (CLG) program, with a Landmarks Preservation Local Law and Model Code as regulated by the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation? If no, please explain.

Mr. John Allen

Yes, I support the creation of a Historic Preservation Commission with Certified Local Government (CLG) status, so that our community would be eligible for Federal Historic Preservation Grants and further historic preservation planning and assistance from the National Park Service (NPS). We need to pass a Landmarks Preservation Local Law in order to provide concrete guidance and firm rules for the preservation of historic assets within the community. A Historic Preservation Commission considered a CLG by NPS would be an excellent tool to preserve our history, but the addition of a Landmarks Preservation Local Law will provide the appropriate legal tools and teeth to the opinions of the Commission. The BOT's current effort to create a Historic Preservation Commission is largely performative and needs additional legal teeth to have any actual effect on development.

Ms. Juliana Alzate

The creation of a Historic Preservation Commission under a CLG program would add a layer of complexity for the Village. The historic properties would be regulated at a local, state and federal level.

Regulation beyond the local government can have the negative impact of not allowing the residents to collaborate in the development of projects. Every case is different and the state and federal regulations could place generalized restrictions that may not fit for every case.

Mr. Joseph Carvin

Any such effort would clearly be anti-democratic. As mentioned above, I am fully supportive of creating an advisory History Commission that provides PC citizens interested in our rich history a voice and important seat at the table. However, providing a commission of this nature with veto power over the development process would be wholly counter-productive to our democratic traditions and would risk truly throwing our village into a cycle of abandonment, if for some reason a small cadre of over-zealous CLG members decide they want to preserve our historical buildings at any cost.

This kind of proposal would disenfranchise the people of Port Chester. It also allows for outside interests to commandeer Village properties. I am supportive of the advisory Commission being considered by the Board of Trustees. This Commission can make recommendations that can ultimately lead to the same outcome as with a CLG program but ensuring that the will of the people is not ignored. CLGs essentially dismiss the voting rights of the people something I don't support.

Mr. Joseph DeVita

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Bart Didden

Candidate has not responded.

Mr. Phil Dorazio

This question has me torn. I want to preserve as much as our history as possible, but we cannot try to save every building or area because we have fond memories of them. All the buildings we want to attach Landmark status or preserve must have historical or architectural significance. I have worked in many of the buildings on Main Street and many of them have been neglected for far too long. This neglect on behalf of the landlord may prove any restoration to be too costly. We have some buildings that I believe must be preserved at all cost and I believe we can accomplish this on a local level. I would love to see some of our buildings on a national registry. I am very much in favor, as I stated in the previous two questions, in forming a historical society that has a budget and is ran as our parks commission is ran. Although parks does not have a budget (the only monies it receives is to compensate the secretary) it does have a voice in ANY & ALL matters concerning the parks in our village. If the only way we can guarantee the preservation of some of our local landmarks is to get them on the national register, then I am completely in favor of this.

Ms. Joan Grangenois-Thomas

Yes.

Two potential candidates also responded to the Historical Society's questionnaire. Their responses are below, but they will not appear on the ballot on March 15, except as "write in" candidates.

Question 1: The Port Chester Historical Society's goal is to preserve Port Chester history and provide resources to educate the public. As a village trustee, how would you support and collaborate with the Port Chester Historical Society?

Ms. Arianna Christopher

As Chair of the Port Chester Beautification Commission, I have been working on establishing a more substantial relationship between the Historical Society and the Village to further our goals of encouraging preservation of historic structures and advising on the aesthetics of all property in the Village.

The Commission presented a report and recommendations to the Board of Trustees in October that are directly relevant to the Historical Society's interests and would be areas for collaboration between the Society and the Village. The report can be accessed here:

https://www.portchesterny.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf1096/f/agendas/2021-10-04_-_agenda_-_backup_0.pdf (pp. 47-63).

Our concerns were and still are:

1. That developments are being approved that will irreversibly change the Village's character and aesthetics without real public engagement or the benefit of feedback from Village stakeholders like the Commission, the ARB, the Historic Society
2. That developments are being approved that are inconsistent with Form Based Code and Comprehensive Plan, including the extensive portions relating to preserving Port Chester's history
3. That the Village's historic properties are being demolished by default and without any public discourse through a review process that (i) rationalizes the demolition of historic buildings because the buildings are not designated, even though the buildings are eligible, and it is the very same people that could take those properties from eligible to designated, and (ii) disregards state and county opinions of adverse impact and advice not to proceed (see the letters at the end of our report, project was still approved)
4. That taxpayers are actually subsidizing the demolition of historic buildings and that the approval process for those subsidies is totally removed from the approval of the development, and without any public discourse

To address these issues, the Beautification Commission presented recommendations to the Village discussed in response to Question #2, and Question #3.

Mr. David Matthews

I would ensure time was provided for direct communication with myself and hopefully the other Village Trustees at the early stages of planning new projects. The discussions would also involve the planning committee to ensure preservation and development concerns are dealt with prior to signing off on new projects impacting historical locations. I would make sure the members of the Village of Trustee participated in a presentation by the Historical Society as part of the orientation to the role of Trustee to better understand the rich history of Port Chester and its significance to the future of the Village. I strongly believe the Historical Society has to be part of the revised strategic plan for the village. The historical Society should also be part of the communication strategy to inform new residents and existing residents of Port Chester's dynamic and impressive history. We should be finding ways to bring to light the importance of our history in guiding our future.

Question 2: As a village trustee, how would you balance the preservation of our rich history with the interests/demands of developers?

Ms. Arianna Christopher

Ideally, development should never require the loss of any of our history, only how the history is preserved. Decisions on that should be based on what Port Chester residents want to prioritize, which is why public engagement is so important and a critical step the Beautification Commission thinks is necessary to address the concerns identified in response to Question #1. Our recommendations:

1. Pause all new Site Plan Reviews (SPR) and stop work on projects to evaluate application of Form Based Code and get back on track with the Comprehensive plan

- 1.1. Meaningful Debate on Development Issues
 - 1.1.1. Requires participation of Village Departments, Commissions, IDA and Village Officers, organizations like the Historical Society and professionals from the Village, and most important Residents
- 1.2. Viability overall – Will a progressive code work in our Village?
- 1.3. What works, what doesn't? Everything from building heights and widths, to adequacy of guidance for reviewers, and provisions that enable approval by silence
- 1.4. Coordination of IDA grants and site plan review
2. Village Survey of Historic Assets and Plan for Future
 - 2.1. Committee to identify historic structures and other assets, if any, and ideas for how to preserve and/or benefit from those assets in the context of the Village's need to grow and eliminate blights, starting with identifying recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan that can be implemented for this purpose (recommendations in Comprehensive Plan can be found here https://www.portchesterny.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1096/f/uploads/finalportchestercomprehensiveplanadopted12-17-2012_0.pdf at pp. 89-91)
 - 2.2. Set Public Hearings for Village identify assets for "protection" with the same meaningful debate as above (the conclusions are not meaningful if there is no real community input)

Mr. David Matthews

In short, I believe working together in a more collaborative way would help to meet the preservation needs of the Village and help the developers to offer more inclusive, creative plans which encompass both the old and the new. The historical society should have access to developers and share their views and strategies of meeting the demands of development while holding on to the richness of the village. This needs to occur at the early stages of discussions of interest in building in our village and include important members of the developer's team, i.e. architects, engineers, etc.

Question 3: Would you support the creation of a Historic Preservation Commission under a Certified Local Government (CLG) program, with a Landmarks Preservation Local Law and Model Code as regulated by the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation? If no, please explain.

Ms. Arianna Christopher

I would support it if that is what the residents of the Village wanted, which could be part of the conversations for the public hearings described in response to Question #2, including the committee work focused on historic preservation.

Mr. David Matthews

No, I don't think it would be helpful or help move the village forward. It creates additional layers to communication and we have not been able to improve communication between IDA, Developers, Planning, and Historical Society. I think this should be put to the voters on the ballot to see if it garners the support necessary to offset the cost of administration and implementation. This goes far beyond an individual trustee's preferences; the villagers must be included in addressing the creation of a new commission.