

# Challenger Andreassen, incumbent Costello grapple for Saugerties' top job

by [Christina Coulter/October 31, 2019/0 comments](#)



Paul Andreassen and Fred Costello, Jr. (photos by Phyllis McCabe)

In a race that has become contentious in recent weeks, current town board member Paul Andreassen, running on the Republican, Conservative and Libertarian party lines, is seeking to unseat incumbent Town Supervisor Fred Costello Jr., running on the Democratic, Working Families and Independence party lines, for the highest office in town government.

Although their voting records are similar, with the exception of one abstention on a vote to approve \$1.3 million to replace the Kiwanis Ice Arena

roof and a public disagreement over replacing a K9 and an officer who had retired from the police force, they say their visions for Saugerties' future are very different.

Andreassen, 63, was elected to the town board in 2017 on the Democratic, Conservative and Independence party lines, leading all four council candidates in votes. He has served as building inspector for the towns of Saugerties, New Paltz, Woodstock and Ulster. Andreassen is also a "badged" building inspector with FEMA, through which he recently assessed damage to homes in Houston and Miami after Hurricane Harvey, and a state instructor for courses on code compliance. He is the leader of the Paul Luke Band, for which he has written and performed an estimated 400 songs. He and his wife Claudia, a Saugerties town justice, have three children and three grandchildren between them. His stepson, Crispin Kott, is a writer for our parent company Ulster Publishing.

Before stepping up as town supervisor 22 months ago, Costello, 50, served on the town board for 13 and a half years, 11 of them as deputy supervisor for the town. He also served on the town's Economic Development Board. His business holdings include Sue's Restaurant, a carwash, apartments in Glasco and a local barbershop.

"In 22 months, we have moved the bar for the town of Saugerties in many ways. We've moved the bar financially — our credit rating has improved," said Costello, referring to the town's A+ credit rating. "We have made our vouching system more accountable and more transparent by digitizing them. We've made ourselves better managers by for the first time [making] an employee handbook and we have resolved contracts with all of our town employees. We've moved the bar by passing 14 laws, [a] pace [that] is unprecedented in 20 years. We have moved the bar by spending an unprecedented amount on infrastructure in a 22-month period. ... We're fixing dams, extending water districts and repairing roads and culvert pipes, all at the same time."

Costello said he's also proud of the town's new designation as a bronze-certified Climate Smart Community, which the town earned after undertaking several initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint.

Costello said that should he be re-elected, he wants to "build off of the successes [his administration] has had already," "put [the town of Saugerties] on a strong financial track so that when the economy turns down we have enough of a fund balance to weather the storm" and "make more of an emphasis for Bristol Beach [and partner] with Woodstock Land Trust, Esopus Bend Preserve and Scenic Hudson [to work on Bristol Beach and other hiking areas]."

He also hopes to oversee zoning changes that would allow a wider range of businesses to operate out of underused areas like Kings Highway; traffic improvements on the by the Thruway exit and the intersection between Route 32 and Glasco Turnpike; and the erection of a new animal shelter. He said he would also continue to work to shut down the illegal dumping of construction and demolition material on properties owned by resident Joe Karolys.

Andreassen, should he be elected, said he wants to establish an independent police commission; build off of "several informal conversations with village trustees and the mayor" to potentially merge some village and town departments; "work harder" on attracting potential buyers to vacant buildings and generate activity on the Kings Highway corridor; update aging infrastructure; and adjust the town's budget so that there is no disparity between departments — "some departments have all the bells and whistles while others seem to be struggling with manpower," he said. He also wants to establish term limits for town offices and establish a "Volunteer's Day celebration" to honor members of the town's many committees and emergency service workers.

**Ice arena**

Andreassen asserted in his March campaign kickoff that he was “not certain of the direction the town is heading,” that a “change of priorities” was in order and that the residents of Saugerties “know the difference between frivolous and necessary spending.” Since then, Andreassen and Costello have taken to the [letters to the editor section of the \*Saugerties Times\*](#), and many other places, to lob accusations back and forth.

The two candidates repeated many of those statements at a candidate’s forum hosted by the League of Women Voters forum at the senior center on Oct. 19.

“I think I told you what my background was? I was never asked once to look at that ice rink or that ice arena,” said Andreassen at the forum. “My expertise could have gone a long way. I sent in drawings. I had an architect make some mock-ups, [that were met with] silence. To say that we were involved, I was not involved at all with that project.”

“[The assertion that Andreassen was not involved in the planning process] is frankly a lie,” said Costello in an interview this week, repeating statements he has made in letters to the editor. “There are 30 emails which he was included in a thread on. Many of those emails he initiated and did not include the rest of the town board, only [Councilman] Mike MacIsaac...If you look back in the legacy of the ice rink, Paul just didn’t want it, and he’s just still fighting a 20-year-old battle...I don’t think he’s clear as to why he’s doing that, either. On one hand he wants to build an \$8 million facility; on the other hand he doesn’t want to even maintain what we have now.”

## **Police commission?**

Andreassen said he hopes that the police commission he intends to found will “meet regularly in a public forum to continually examine issues including why turnover of the police force has been so high. It’s not just about salary — we should be able to retain good officers.”

He added that a closer eye needs to be kept on police spending — “our town doesn’t need everything and anything” — and criticized Chief Joe Sinagra.

Andreassen said Sinagra has “such an inordinate presence heading parades and features so prominently in local papers and photo shoots, when other town officials who are doing more for the public should be better recognized.”

Andreassen said that although the town board serves as the de facto police commission, the board has never convened in that capacity. He joked in an interview this week that the first thing he would do, should he attain the office, would be to “revoke the chief’s press pass.”

“The police chief is too powerful and political,” said Andreassen. “He’s using the title our town gives him along with our resources to weigh into countywide races. There are concerns regarding the supervisor and town board members being intimidated and or scared by the chief to the point where he can do whatever he wanted unquestioningly...As a building official, if I had to interface with the press, [I would just] give them the facts — that should be it. No personal inferences, no bringing up the politicizing anything, it’s not healthy...We’re elected by the majority of the people to serve the whole town. Every utterance from every department is a reflection of those elected officials, and I can tell you, there’s a lot of stuff that comes out of that office that I don’t agree with what I read, and it makes me uncomfortable.”

Contacted for comment, Sinagra wrote in an email this week that he recalled Andreassen coming into his office and requesting a freeze on all department press releases. Since, he said, Andreassen has not met with him to “learn about the workings of a 21st century police department.”

“Mr. Andreassen simply believes it is better to keep the residents of Saugerties in the dark as to what crimes are occurring in our community,”

wrote Sinagra. "I don't agree with this philosophy at all, and I don't think the media or anyone else would agree that keeping the public uninformed is what any community wants or expects from their police chief. ... Mr. Andreassen apparently wants to take the police department back into the days of yesteryear, where town constable rode around in used police cars, attended no training and made \$7 an hour. Mr. Andreassen's vision of what the Saugerties police department should be is dangerous and will only compromise public safety. We have real criminal issues to deal with on a daily basis and the men and women of the Saugerties police are the very best in law enforcement and should not be looked down upon as the bastard child of town government."

Sinagra added: "The public deserves to be informed. It appears as though Mr. Andreassen is willing to hide the truth from the public ... rather wanting our community to believe his false narratives."

Costello did not immediately rule out a separate police commission. "If it's demonstrated that a police commission can do a better job than we are doing, I'm open to that suggestion...but right now, I'm very proud of the strides that our police department has made to become one of the [best] police departments in Ulster County" said Costello at the League forum. "There's a significant amount of oversight. We wouldn't be an accredited agency if we did not have oversight...Those accreditations aren't just doled out, they're taken very seriously."

In an interview this week, Costello expanded on his thoughts. "One of my concerns about a police commission is that ultimately, if there's a problem in the police department, residents won't question the police commission, they'll want to know what the town board does," Costello said. Costello also noted that, because the Saugerties Police Department oversees both the town and the village, the decision to establish a police commission would also have to include the village government. He also noted that the police department has "led every parade I was a part of."

"I think [Costello is] afraid of the chief, myself," said Andreassen of Costello's relationship with Sinagra. "He does an inordinate amount of bidding for the chief, which would never happen with me...I have no intentions of cutting anyone out of the police department. I think we're going to take a closer look at the budget. Under my administration, there will never be three people driving to a one-day seminar in Buffalo without a written request from me in the beginning. That kind of stuff needs to be looked at."

Andreassen also stands by his opposition of the reinstatement of a canine officer position in August.

"When they first brought about the idea of the cadaver dog, that was about as outrageous a thing as I had ever heard," said Andreassen. "That went by the wayside and then when Mike Craft retired, I thought that this was a great opportunity to retire a position without someone losing their job. If there were a majority of the board in agreement to that, we may have just abolished that position. But we didn't, and it is what it is."

## **The mileage affair**

Andreassen introduced another point of contention into the race last month, when he wrote a letter to the editor calling out Costello for taking out a \$426 mileage reimbursement to travel from a vacation in Cape Cod to a hearing in state Supreme Court in [the Karolys matter](#), and another trip back from the Cape for an event in Saugerties. According to the voucher for the reimbursement, Costello drove from a site in Cape Cod to the hearing in Kingston on Aug. 12, drove back to Cape Cod on Aug. 13 and then back to Saugerties on Aug. 15 for a food truck festival at Cantine Field.

According to other documents obtained from the town clerk to verify this precedent, previous town supervisor Greg Helsmoortel got a \$4000 yearly mileage reimbursement. Similarly, former town supervisor Kelly Myers received at least \$4500 in mileage reimbursements during her tenure.

Costello said although he has taken frequent trips to Kingston and Albany for town-involved matters, he has done so on his own dime until now. Andreassen said should he be elected supervisor, he will never take out a mileage reimbursement.

"I can't speak for every town, but it's not uncommon for supervisors to get a vehicle allowance or a vehicle — I haven't taken either," said Costello. "The only thing I've taken so far is I requested a mileage reimbursement for my trip coming home from Cape Cod. I [didn't] have to be [present], but it was only the second or the third hearing [in the Karolys case] and I felt it was important that I be present, especially given the level of public interest in this. The town has invested a considerable amount of resources into this effort, and I didn't want the perception of the court to be that we weren't serious."

"I do believe that attending those [Karolys] hearings...in a group, even at the zoning board of appeals meeting, that might have ever played into the hands of the defendant...on their side of the aisle [in their assertion in court] that the town is ganging up on the defendant," said Andreassen at the forum. "We should let the process take its course."

"I disagree with the [assertion that] public's input somehow influenced the process in a negative way," said Costello at the forum. "If we didn't have active neighbors telling us what was happening, we may not have known until it was move visible from this side of the road. I thank ... the public's input... they [have been helpful]."

Andreassen still doubts town officials being in court for the Karolys hearings will make any difference in what the judge ultimately says. "There comes a point where the public outcry might just be an echo chamber that you might just be better off letting the due process work its course to whatever the final solution is by the court system and sitting in the gallery, I don't believe, is going to make that outcome any better," said Andreassen in a later interview. "I believe with all of the activists who are, I believe all of the



activists who are engaged in that debate have certainly admirable, if they really want to help our community, they can show up any Wednesday at the Habitat for Humanity project and we'd be glad to have them there to help."

Both candidates say that, should they be elected, they will solicit resumes and conduct interviews to determine the appointments of any council seats left open — should town board member John Schoonmaker win his race for county legislator, he would have to resign from the town board and should Andreassen unseat Costello, Andreassen's seat on the board would have to be filled.