

Saugerties supervisor race heats up

by [Christina Coulter/October 6, 2019/0 comments](#)



Fred Costello, Jr. and Paul Andreassen

The Saugerties Town Supervisor race has taken to the [letters to the editor](#) section. Both challenger Paul Andreassen and incumbent Supervisor Fred Costello Jr. flung written attacks at each other this week. According to Andreassen, Costello misused taxpayer funds to finance a trip from his vacation spot on Cape Cod to a court hearing in Kingston.

A few days later, Costello blasted Andreassen for the councilman's abstention on a vote last month concerning the Kiwanis Ice Arena, writing that Andreassen let the town down by not contributing his expertise to the deliberations surrounding the rink's repair.

According to Andreassen's letter, Costello put in for a \$500 mileage

reimbursement after, on Aug. 12, the supervisor vacated his vacation to return to Kingston to attend a court hearing on the Karolys matter.

"The meeting was not critical and the outcome would have been the same whether he attended or not," Andreassen wrote. "If this were an anomaly or an isolated incident of policy misinterpretation or wasteful spending, I wouldn't be worrying about it. But it's not. It's more than that. It's wrong. I believe the town supervisor should refund the town for his travels and work with me and the other board members to eliminate policy loopholes and strengthen clear penalties for intentional breach of the public trust."

After this reporter inquired about the expenditure, Costello shot back, writing that Andreassen "once again is trying to reinvent history" and questioned his opponent's motives for abstaining from a vote on whether to replace the dilapidated roof of the Kiwanis Ice Rink.

Both Andreassen and Costello have ample prior experience — the former as a longtime building inspector/code enforcement officer in Saugerties as well as in three other towns including Woodstock and New Paltz; the latter as a town councilman for 14 years before ascending to his current position. In 2017, Andreassen accrued 4,056 votes of 5,530 total votes cast before absentee ballots were counted in his 2017 bid for town council. (John Schoonmaker came in second place on election night votes with 2,175.)

Since then, the town board has experienced a gradual rift, openly acknowledged by both candidates now that they are political opponents. After months of across-the-board "yes" votes on virtually every motion that the board considered, the two began to disagree publicly — first regarding the replacement of a police dog and then regarding the manner in which the deteriorating Kiwanis Ice Arena should be handled.

As the rift got bigger, so apparently did Andreassen's will to run, culminating in a press release announcing his candidacy on March 2. Since, Andreassen and Costello have remained stiffly amicable at board meetings, until this

week's exchange of letters to the editor.

Costello conceded this week that he did put in for a \$500 mileage reimbursement on Aug. 12 to attend the second session of hearings in state Supreme Court to determine the fate of a stop-work order on dumpsites owned by Saugerties resident Joe Karolys. Records obtained from the Saugerties Town Clerk through a Freedom of Information Act request determined that this number is actually slightly lower, at \$476 — 58 cents per mile.

"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 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."

According to other documents FOIed from the town clerk to verify this precedent, previous town supervisor Greg Helsmoortel got a \$4,000 yearly mileage reimbursement. Similarly, former town supervisor Kelly Myers received \$4,500 in mileage reimbursement. 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.

"[Until now] I have not taken any vehicle allowance," said Costello via text message before the documents were received. "The mileage request for attending court was my first and only request. I guess I could argue that I have saved the budget over \$7,500 over the past two years."

After the interview, Costello sent in a letter to the editor criticizing Andreassen's decision to abstain from the vote to approve a \$1.3 million dollar repair to the Kiwanis Ice Arena in June.

"Through recreation fees, parking revenue, pledges by Kiwanis, pledges by others, grants from [state] Senator [George] Amedore and former Assemblyman [Pete] Lopez, 70 percent of the \$1.3 million dollar budget for the project has been secured," wrote Costello. "The balance of costs associated with the project will be assessed against ice rink revenues over the next few years. The use of ice rink revenues to pay for improvements to the facility is nothing new. Ice rink revenues have paid for many past improvements including the rink's current roof, the concrete floor, the Zamboni and more. As a result of becoming fully insulated, a significant savings in energy will also be realized and the opportunity to operate a year round facility will exist.

The combination of being able to host in excess of 1,000 people and operating a year-round facility will greatly enhance the ability for the ice rink to grow revenue well in excess of \$350,000."

Costello went on to write that Andreassen could have contributed useful expertise to the decision, given his experience as a building inspector, and that, despite his explanation at the time for abstaining, Andreassen had access to all of the information that the other board members had regarding the repairs, and even had additional conversations with professionals advising the board on the project that he "chose not to disclose or report" to the rest of the board.

"I didn't have enough information and I didn't have a chance to see what this contract even was," said Andreassen after the June 20 vote. "It was a single bidder which was a little unsettling, and it would have been better to have several more to compare again. I had proposed and sent drawings for a more permanent type of structure, like a concept, and that was last year and no one but Mike MacIsaac responded. It would have cost more than the one proposed ... but the ones that I submitted would have been year-round. The town is settling for what we have and what we're going to go forward with, and again, there are five members on the board, they have the ability

to vote whichever way they want. I'm not anti-ice arena, I'm not anti-skating, I have family members who play hockey. I abstained, I didn't vote no."

Andreassen declined to comment further on Costello's remarks this week; however, asking that his response be taken from a letter to the editor he wrote on the subject that was printed in the Sept. 26 issue of the *Saugerties Times*.

"There was marginal planning and little budgeting for the ice arena," wrote Andreassen. "Relying on grants, projected revenues and recreation fees from future development to fund a project is not realistic. When the lack of budgeting for improvements or expenditures is questionable, everyone should be concerned. Costly improvements that put the town in any debt or fiscal stress warrant additional scrutiny, not less. ... The approval process was expedited without a hearing, debate, discussion, consultants describing in detail the plans, specifications or contract language and without the town's accountant explaining, in public, what this project entails or how it would be paid for."

Andreassen went on to write that he had requested a clerk of the works be assigned to oversee the ice arena project, and noted that building projects that are not approved by town government must go through a rigorous approval process through the planning board. He cited that no studies were made to assess the repair's potential environmental impact, and that, should he be elected supervisor, "all town construction projects will go through a rigorous planning process and will be transparent." He also wrote that before his tenure on the town board, he had offered his expertise to a previous town board that included Costello, asking to chair a committee to research the feasibility of a permanent, year-round structure to house the ice arena. He wrote that he never received a response to his offer.