

TAL SIMHONI SUFFERN MAYORAL HOPEFUL

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz

Politics can be a dirty business and people say that when a candidate is afraid of losing, they do things that are an attempt to hurt the other candidate, especially in the closing weeks of a campaign run. A Suffern resident informed me that during the Suffern Street Fair on Sunday October 15, 2023, current Mayor Michael Curley was going around telling people not to talk to opponent Tal Simhoni and not to vote for her. The resident added that this was not a nice thing to do. He should be more professional about this.

Who is Tal Simhoni. She is the single mother of three young children is running for Mayor of the Village of Suffern. She works for Adult Protective Services under the Supreme Court. She's an inventor, and a Cub Scout mom.

You're a single mom of three kids, that's takes a lot of organizational skills. With all of that, cub scouts, and everything else you do, why did you decide to run for mayor of Suffern? That's a full-time job in itself.

"I'm very organized so I can make it an efficient way that I can delegate things that need to be delegated. I feel that it's a place that I want my children to feel safe and that we're able to afford it for the foreseeable future. I think I can do a good job at that. "

There are many issues facing municipalities these days in this economy. Was there any one particular issue that really got Simhoni's dander up to run on?

"I had criminals that took over my house. It's a long story but they were known to the Rockland County DA. The police in Suffern got in touch with the DA and the DA that they were trying to communicate back to the Suffern Police, and something fell apart in the communication and my house was robbed. I'd like to avoid anything like that to bring more communication with outside law enforcement. That was one thing."

She feels that another thing is that there are opportunities for growth of small businesses that could be improved, and that she can bring that to Suffern.

<https://youtu.be/fCUUDSOeiS8>

Another major issue as everybody across the country knows, that New York and California are the two highest tax states in the country, vying for one and two at any given time. What can she do as mayor along with the village council, to help alleviate the taxes on the taxpayers in Suffern?

"I'm so glad you asked me this question. I have a great idea to bring small businesses MWBE which stands for Minority Women Business Enterprises. You can get federal and state tax incentives to offset taxes to help pay for infrastructure that we need and projects that are often funded by debt or bonds. I feel that I can bring that in and help alleviate the tax situation."

She says that this would that benefit the taxpayer itself through property taxes because the more you bring in the less the taxpayers ultimately have to cough up out of their own pockets.

<https://youtu.be/mwfKXEOHsfU>

Taxpayers not coughing up more out of their pockets is a great thing but do you think you might be able to do a bit of a refund or reduction in taxes to the taxpayers in their village taxes should you be able to get these businesses into Suffern?

“Eventually yes a reduction, yes. I don’t see a refund, but I would say a reduction or an abatement possibly.”

Bringing businesses into Suffern is a great idea. The problem is bringing in the right kinds of businesses in to the village. What kind of businesses do you think would fit well in Suffern?

Simhoni feels that there’s a lot of variety you can bring in. One example she gave is there’s a lot of construction, so you can have engineers that you need.

“We have studies that need to be done with the traffic situation. Not just the physical labor or construction projects, but what goes on before that, the expertise you need to bring in. You can have a number of shops that are empty right now. Tax incentives to offer the landlords to fill those shops with minority business owners and entrepreneurs that can bring in such a variety. I also think tourism would definitely help our economy. It’s a place that’s on the map that has a lot of potential.”

She added that County Executive Ed Day is also promoting the MWBE. She also mentioned an article entitled, ‘Getting Best Value for Rockland’s Taxpayers.’ The second thing she mentions here is that the ‘Second benefit allows the county to consider bidders status as a minority or women owned business enterprise when determining contract awards. Most MWBE firms are also small local businesses so increasing contract awards to these companies helps the local economy.

If you can pull this off, that’s a pretty high placed individual in county politics that’s willing to back you on what you’re doing here.

“I really have some doors that are already open. I’m a certified MWBE business myself aside from my three children and my regular job. I’ve already reached out to MWBE Strategies, and they would love to assist us with putting together a platform so you’ve got the bidders and the other side to become certified and that opens up even more opportunities for all of those different types of people who need those opportunities. It can be an online platform where you have both sides. It’s a matchmaking between the government basically and you’ve got tax incentives that come with that. It’s a great program.”

Many municipalities offer potential businesses a tax incentive program called PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) This is where a company comes in and pays a certain percentage of the assessed property taxes and that percentage increases over time until the whole assessed property tax value is being paid. Have you thought about maybe doing a PILOT program?

“I would need to explore that. There’s endless possibilities. There’s federal, state and local. There’s an abundance of data to put together and organize it into something that everybody can use back and forth. I also want to say something about the Palisades Mall. If this is something that can bring more business to the Palisades Mall, it can be a model.”

These types of programs take on a life of their own and expand when somebody sees something working and they get benefits from it they will naturally expand on their own. You may start in Suffern, and you talk to someone at the mall and then all of the sudden, word of mouth and you’ve got a whole big thing.

You can have a lot of diversity coming in so many ways. It’s a revolution that has already started in other places and we can follow the same type of model.

A major controversial topic in this country is parental rights in education. One thing that goes hand in hand with parental rights in education and education itself. You have opposing factions here. People who say you have the school district do what they have got to do without the parents interfering with our plans. Then you have the parents who say, no we want a say in our kids' education. Where are you on that?

Simhoni feels that education and values start at home. "I feel that nobody should be discriminated against for their choices, but I don't feel that it's something that needs to be pushed, I would like to have some input as do other parents I have spoken with. We don't want things taught to our children that we feel shouldn't be taught to them. What we teach at home is what we want. There's a separation between home and school."

You don't want your values being usurped by teachers.

"I would like to still be a parent and have that responsibility and bring my children up the way I feel they should be taught." She stated.

Throughout the county, especially after the storms we had about a month or so ago a lot of the infrastructure has been almost obliterated if not totally gone. Bear Mountain was closed over a month after those storms hit. What do you see as some infrastructure projects for Suffern?

"Within Suffern we need to plan for the bitter region as well. There are smaller details that have to be planned out like lining up your ducks in a row so that we don't spend money and then have to redo something. We need to take an overall look at URGENT structural issues, whether it belongs to Suffern. If it belongs to the railroad. If it belongs to New Jersey." Simhoni said.

There is one particular place that I am thinking of that looks to me that if there's a storm, a truck will fall off of that ramp. It's so deteriorated. I don't know why cars are still going up it because it looks so dangerous. The drainage wasn't done correctly so you can see roots of trees coming through cracks of the wall, the retaining wall to that ramp. With a storm, that ramp can fall and then all of the cars that need to pass through that area are going to be unable to pass. You won't be able to get an ambulance through. It's so urgent it should have already been addressed. Whoever's responsibility it is to pay for it may be different, but it has to be addressed. Somebody has to take the responsibility to figure out how that's going to be done!" Simhoni exclaimed.

She also pointed out what she feels are some problems with the current development that is going on. "There's been so much development in the area. Unfortunately, the development was planned before the infrastructure. You really need roadways to be replanned with state authorities and within so that you can make it flow and safe."

<https://youtu.be/YzwRKQEBhOk>

You're talking about developments being built as far as office buildings, businesses or apartments, it's not just the roads. It's water pipes, sewage and drainage that also needs to be addressed.

Simhoni explained how she would go about making sure the developments would be best dealt with. "That's why I said line up the ducks in a row before we spend money from the taxes right now. We need to just take a breather and try to plan it out with the engineers to figure out what we need to plan for in the long run. Until we have that plan, not to spend anything except for maintaining what we have in order to exist right now as best as we can. I wouldn't be spending right now until we have a much smarter plan for the future."

She added, “More detailed and laid out with a schedule of completion. It gets into the minute details. You also need to take care of the sidewalks. You need to take care of the utility wires that are hanging around. A lot of them are probably obsolete and need to be removed. It looks like a third world country in some places. They could be falling down. They should be going through a conduit so they can be accessed so they can maintain them. Not necessarily buried, but when you are doing the sidewalks, have that as part of the plan.”

Let’s talk about traffic. Traffic is a very important issue not just in Suffern but throughout the county. In 1950 the population of the county was 89,276. In 70 years it has jumped to 339,022. I’ve come home from New York City and crawled in traffic on the thruway had to get off at exit ten and then crawl in traffic up 9W. How would you deal with the traffic patterns where you’ve got one lane going in each direction and the stores and the parking.

“I would work with the state authorities since it’s a state road. I would work with Hillburn, Sloatsburg with all of the other areas also with the thruway so we can possibly make another exit that comes off onto Washington Avenue or an overpass. You are going to have to have a helicopter view and see what the traffic patterns are and work with engineers and people who can either figure out which directions the roads can go as a one way and get the traffic into a belt so it starts flowing better.”

Parking along route 59 can be a huge problem in Suffern. With cars parked on both sides, it makes it difficult at best for two cars going in opposite directions to get passed each other in the village just after the church heading towards the train station. What can you do to deal with this problem?

“I would like to think of it as a runway because you have businesses there that need to survive for us to have quick access especially during the winter. You have to have something where it’s convenient to park, unused space or space that is not used as well as it can be planned on both sides from behind the stores. If we can somehow make that into a traffic flow that goes around so that cars can have access and some kind of runway system so that if a car pulls over, gets what they need out of the store and then can leave, it makes room for the next set of cars.”

“There is municipal parking in Suffern, but Simhoni says that it is not necessarily convenient, especially in bad weather. “Weather permitting it’s good for people who don’t have issues getting out of their car and stuff, it’s not necessarily convenient. It can be improved. There’s also parking lot that is taking up an entire corner that doesn’t have an exit.”

According to Simhoni, you have to go around in a circle which just causes another blockage because it’s one way in one way out. If you have an exit on the other side and have some type of right of way or some agreement with the property owner there, it will help make traffic right in that corner flow even better.
ME: Someone like me who doesn’t go shopping in Suffern that much, buying a booklet like that would be cost ineffective for me. You get a lot of people who come into Suffern for things like the Suffern fair and things like that and the other street fairs that are there.

Let’s talk again about schools and education. There are people who want to destroy and rewrite our history because we had slavery. Every culture throughout history has had slavery. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Sumerians, British, French, American Indians etc. Slavery has been a recognized institution throughout history. You don’t see any other country getting rid of their past on it. They educate their children. We did this. It’s not a good thing but we did it.

“The United States has such deep principles and values that we treat everybody, no matter who they are with respect. The education is so important. If you don’t teach the education you don’t know any better. But schools have to be safe also.”

Her biggest fear as a mother is that there may be a mass shooting in a school in Suffern. As it is for every parent. It gives me chills to think about it. She understands that the school board has the authority over the schools and that you can’t do anything with the schools without going through the school board. What ideas do you have to help the school board or to give to the school board that says hey, let’s do this... to make sure the schools are safe?

“First of all our police force has to have communication with outside agencies so we have communications going in and out so we know who is potentially at risk in our neighborhood. Our police force has to be ready and trained. I’m sure there’s been training, but there’s never enough. I would recommend that they install Special doors and alarms that alert building authorities that a door was opened without authorization. Not to mention cameras covering 360 degrees outside around the school and inside. School resource officers. Retired police officers, from the community, if possible, because they would stand a better chance of knowing the students and it would make them more relaxed. We also have to have people patrolling the halls to make sure that no doors are left open by accident like what happened in Uvalde.”

In this time of major division in this country, Simhoni understands the need to unify everyone so the Village of Suffern can work together to grow. She has a couple of ideas on how to make this happen.

A big thing lately in the news especially in Rockland County in the past couple of years is Anti – Semitism. The Jewish community is expanding throughout Rockland County. When somebody I know was running for school board, here in North Rockland, he had a Jewish last name and people said they had to prevent that guy from getting onto the board because he’s Hasidic. He wasn’t in any way shape or form. To me that’s antisemitic. You had that guy who went ballistic in Wesley Hills a few years ago, 2019 I believe it was. We have a lot of antisemitism here. You’d think that in Rockland County with the Jewish population we have here it would be minimal. But it seems to be growing. What plans do you have to help people to not hate or fear the Jewish population and act on it?

“It has to start with the children. If you have young children who come to the community for programs that teach tolerance before even embracing diversity. First teach tolerance. Teach science. Teach history. Bring an understanding of how we are all human beings. To Have respect for one another. When that happens at a young age, hopefully those children will go home and question when they hear something that was said against blacks, Spanish, Jews and Muslims, anybody. It’s got to start at a young age. There’s something that I studies called the trans-generational transmission of trauma. From one generation to the next. It’s coming from the grandparents who say something to shape the view and there’s a trauma that comes with it to teach the younger generation. If we can get to that younger generation and reverse that.” She said.

What she was talking about is trickle down prejudice. Yes. And I pray that I can bring that theory to our community and start to heal it and bring people together.

https://youtu.be/dJw_e-IJHAE

Having identified the problem she has one potential solution, stopping the trickle down prejudice from grandparent to parents to children and so forth. What other ideas does she have to help?

She would go to churches and Mosques. Then she would speak to community leaders and have them put together with her a program that our individual cultures can identify with and bring it together.

“I would definitely go around to the community and make bridges. I would also go to the Holocaust study center and try again with the younger children, they need to learn the histories so that we can prevent it from repeating itself. I also have another idea though. With MWBE, we can bring in such a variety of different people that have businesses. It’s not necessarily one type of demographic. It can come from other places in the country bringing that business into Suffern also. You’re going to have more of a salad. You have every type to bring it in and make it like a multi-cultural destination. A melting pot. Not a dominance by one particular demographic because you’re bringing so much more in. For example,, the inventory of homes. If you’ve got more people, Jehovah’s Witnesses and everybody trying to get in, you’re bringing the feeling of diversity and a multi-cultural atmosphere to Suffern.”

Simhoni related a story to me about a situation where she was arrested in Florida and that someone, released her mugshot to the public. She has an idea who it might be but didn’t mention the person’s name.

You told me that you had a situation down in Florida where you were arrested and that it was a mistake. Somebody used that to try to cut you down a little bit and make people leery of you. Why don’t you explain what that was all about then we can move on from there.

“I was arrested for a felony and the charges were dropped by the prosecution. There was nothing else after that. It wasn’t a LACK of evidence. It was the evidence. It wasn’t just lack of evidence to convict me. It vindicated me. I hadn’t been guilty in any way and the charges were dropped.”

How was somebody able to use your mugshot against you.

“I kept my mugshot on the internet. Because in Florida, whether you’re found guilty or not, your mugshot is public record. You have the right if you don’t have any charges against you to have it removed. I kept it up there, it’s a terrible picture. I kept it there for a while because I wanted to be able to tell my children the story of what had happened. You can be accused of something, and you need to stand up for yourself and make it right. When it was distributed around, disseminated, I decided to have it taken off, so it’s no longer there.”

And the dissemination of it, she felt was a way to... To have her consider not running because, “I really felt my chest was cleared and I can go and run. Not that I like the picture, but the event itself is still something I will be telling my children about.”

Your opponent is Mayor Curley, the current mayor of Suffern. What has he done as mayor that you disagree with that you feel shouldn’t have been done and would change if you could?

“He decided to hire two people for salaries for what he wants is a renters registry list, which is a list of homes being rented here in Suffern. I put together something I would like to read if you don’t mind. There are some homes that have been used for renting to renters. They have more renters than code enforcement allows for safety, and they shouldn’t. It can be a problem. The solution is not to have a renters registry list that is going to require two salaries and a nightmare of keeping this renter’s registry list up to date. There’s a much better way that exists and it’s free and it’s reliable and it already exists, and you don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

This program she is talking about is through AirBNB. “They won’t mind having Suffern homes. It’s free to list. Not only is it free to list, but the village can just print out the list of who’s listed. If you are going to rent your house, why does Suffern have to have a police officer, a code enforcement officer running after everybody to see who’s on the list. If you’ve got a free platform that you can download and see which homes, it shouldn’t hurt any owners even if it’s long term. You don’t have to have short-term renters. The vetting of the renters is already done for you also. You get their id, you get their background. You get some credit, so you know exactly

who's inside the house. Then it's all there in the system. You don't have to have your own software that you are going to pay for now. I have a little note I made right here. Between the administration and enforcement of a renter's registry list as Curley promises having two employees to fill this, he's going to find significant overlaps, gaps and fragmentation in the village. We're only two miles and as I said there's already a better way. It can be long term. It's free and it's reliable."

<https://youtu.be/a3eltKmlqxo>

How much are the salaries of those two people?

"That's one of my questions for Curley. But it's still going to come out of your taxes. We can cut that expense and not to mention the software and for the training. AirBNB has a system that you can connect to the government so that the government has control. If the house is not up to code, that house will not be listed with a green check mark with AirBNB. Until it's resolved and you can get a permit or something that the village can benefit from, in two ways. You know that the house has passed inspection and then AirBNB lets it be check marked. It's already done on an Excel sheet all you have to do is print it out."

What else that he did that you disagree with and think needs to be changed?

"He increased fees for parking permits. While that's going to save a majority of the voters and taxpayers from a tax increase. It's not going to be welcoming to other people that bring business and don't necessarily live in Suffern to come into Suffern and get the economy going."

With the economy the way it is now, everything is more expensive and everybody's raising rates and fees all over the place.

She agreed but added that you have to balance it out and like she said small business enterprises have some much to bring to Suffern to take advantage of those benefits which can help offset the taxes.

Public safety especially when dealing with housing and things like that part of the antisemitism lately has been because of the situation at Evergreen in Spring Valley, where a rabbi and his son, using a blow torch to kosher a place for Passover, kind of lost control of the situation and burned down the building and cost the lives of a resident and a volunteer fireman. In Suffern and in that general area, you have a very large Jewish and Hassidic community that has to go through that procedure of sterilizing or whatever word you want to use, koshering an area and we need to overall for anybody, not just the Jewish community or anybody from using things that can potentially cause the Evergreen situation, even on a smaller scale.

"For anybody using a blow torch, I would like for there to be either a permit, by the way the fire department can benefit from permits, certainly to prevent fires and for the safety. It's clearly a way to safeguard the practice. But if you have something that requires a permit or a licensed technician to use a blowtorch, in hindsight that is something we should definitely have going forward."

Okay. I go and apply for a permit to use a blowtorch. I have no idea what I am doing with a blowtorch, but I have the permit.

"It's better that you have the permit because if you make an arrangement with the fire department, at least they are aware of when you are going to be doing it and they can be on notice. It's better to have something. People should not be going around with blowtorches without skill on how to use it. The permit should require something that shows you have some capability of handling the blowtorch safely. Clearly, it's a matter of public safety that you want to have in place." She stated.

According to Simhoni, public safety is not limited to just preventing fires. It includes the roadways as well. “Like I said, there’s some roads that if there is going to be a storm, I fear that there’s one in particular that is going to collapse. They need to be addressed. The roadways are definitely part of public safety umbrella.

“I would like to go back to antisemitism because it’s a fear that if you are going to have people that believe there’s been a miscarriage of justice, it can create hatred. Nobody is above the law. We also have to empower everybody so they don’t feel they are disadvantaged.

Disadvantaged, that’s a different issue than public safety. That would be more of a social cultural thing. How does antisemitism play into public safety?

Simhoni says that you don’t want someone going into a kosher market with a gun because they are hateful of the Jews that are innocently buying from a supermarket where it used to be that you can buy pork chops. “The people who wanted to have the things they are accustomed to, who want to serve pork at Christmas time, where do they go and get it now if it’s not conveniently located near them? Is it a long stretch on how it gets to public safety, maybe, but we have to be inclusive of everybody and find ways to do that.”

I think it’s also a matter of public safety in that just being able to walk the streets without the fear of being attacked because of what you are.

She nodded in agreement and added that all of these ideas coming together when it comes to honoring the firefighter that was lost, bringing some common sense to that as a result that we do have to have blowtorches used by people who can control it with a license or some type of safety measure.

Are there any more issues on public safety that concern you?

“I mean the current situation, I don’t know if you saw it on Channel 12 News, there’s some internal conflicts going on with the police department in Suffern. There’s an officer who was promoted and the question was whether or not he has the credentials compared to other officers who could have been considered for the promotion. When you have internal conflict within a small police department, you need somebody from the outside who’s not considered to be a part of the good old boys club, to come and reorganize it so that they can function and focus on crime. It can also bring morale down and then the police are not as effective in protecting the public.”

Why should the voters of Suffern vote for Simhoni over Curley?

<https://youtu.be/w9gfX5XCJXM>