



Lyndonville

Simon dominates absentee ballots, elected Yates town supervisor



Jim Simon

By Tom Rivers, Editor Posted 10 November 2015

YATES – Persistence paid off for Jim Simon today when 86 absentee ballots were counted in the Town of Yates and Simon emerged the winner for town supervisor.

Simon has been a vocal critic for a proposed wind turbine project in town. The Town Republican Committee endorsed John Belson for another term as town supervisor in the spring.

Simon, with backing from the Save Ontario Shores citizens group, forced a GOP primary on Sept. 10, but lost to Belson, 153-146. The race was so close it went to the absentee ballots, with Belson winning.

But Simon wouldn't go away. He announced a write-in bid for town supervisor. Those campaigns have historically been unsuccessful locally. However, two Medina residents – Mike Sidari and Marguerite Sherman – were elected to the Medina Village Board in March 2014 with write-ins.

A week ago, when the polls closed Belson was ahead by 14 votes, 352 to 338 for Simon. There were 86 absentees.

Simon would get 56 votes when they were counted this morning, with Belson getting 27. Three other ballots weren't counted because two people voted for "John Simon" and one person filled in the circle for Belson, and didn't fully erase it after writing in Simon's name.

When all the votes were counted, Simon won 393 to 379. He takes office on Jan. 1. He will be joined by John Riggi, another turbine opponent with backing from Save Ontario Shores. (Riggi is president of that group.)

"It is very humbling to have 393 people write my name in," Simon said after the votes were counted at the Board of Elections. "John Belson is a good man and he's served well. I look forward to working with him in the transition."

Simon works as the dean for the GCC campus centers in Albion and Medina. He knows many of the community leaders at the local, county and state level through his position at GCC. He looks forward to engaging those leaders in building a stronger small business and residential environment for Yates.

He remains strongly opposed to the project proposed by Apex Clean Energy. He said the company secretly started negotiating with landowners for six months before going public with the project and meeting with town officials.

Apex is proposing to build 60 to 68 turbines that peak at 570 feet tall in Yates and Somerset.

Somerset did a citizen survey that showed strong town opposition to the project. The Somerset Town Board and Niagara County Legislature both formally opposed the plan.

Simon has urged Yates and county officials to be more staunch in their opposition. Both Yates and county officials have said they want to see a survey first, gauging citizen feedback.

Simon and Save Ontario Shores have criticized the town for moving too slow on the survey. Belson said today the official town survey should be out in about two weeks with results tabulated in December.

“We tried to run a nice, clean campaign,” Belson said after the absentees were counted. “We tried to stay positive and do everything correctly.”

Belson said he plans to remain active in the community. His immediate goal is finishing up the town budget for 2016. That goes to a vote at Thursday’s Town Board meeting.

The turbine project has been contentious and divisive. The town doesn’t have the final say in the project. The state created a seven-member State Siting Commission to review and vote on the project. Five of the seven members are state officials with two from the local community.

Simon said he will be pushing hard to fight the loss of “home rule” on the project. If Yates and the county can come out against the project, following Somerset and Niagara, Simon said it would be more difficult for the state to impose an unwanted project on Yates and Somerset.

“I will do everything in my power to make it a local decision,” Simon said. “We’re going to explore every option to bring back home rule.”