

Local 1522 Election Questionnaire

City of New London, Council Election, 2013

Candidate Name: Ronna Stuller

- 1) Many of you are new to politics and we are just learning who you are. Please take a minute to explain who you are. i.e. Where do you work, if you own a business explain it, do you own or rent and anything else that will help us get to know you. Obviously we know some of you very well and you may feel comfortable skipping this question.

I'm a retired preschool teacher. I grew up in Philadelphia, and have owned a home and lived in New London since 1994. I've been a member of the Green Party since 2004. I'm active on many fronts: founding member of Thames Hilltop Neighborhood Association and the Riverside Park Conservancy; member of the Southeast CT Peace & Justice Network; board member of Thames Valley Sustainable Connections. Some of you might have watched the local public access TV show "Thinking Green," of which I am a producer and frequent host.

- 2) Why are you seeking election and what qualifies you for the position?

I was on the New London Board of Education 2009-11. While I liked serving in a capacity that benefited from my professional expertise (especially as I had former students attending New London public schools at every grade level), I have always been interested in more general issues related to the health, sustainability, and economic development of cities. From my years working as a Head Start Home Visitor, I became familiar with people and neighborhoods throughout the city, so I feel confident that I can represent all New Londoners. One thing I brought to Board of Education was the willingness and ability to form cross-party coalitions in support of worthwhile causes.

- 2) If elected what would your top 3 priorities (goals) be? Why? How will you go about achieving these priorities?

(1) Invest in New London's roads and sidewalks and reconnect currently isolated parts of the city, to improve access, safety and walkability. (2) Develop a fairer tax code that encourages home improvement, infill development, and respects longtime owners. (3) Restore and maintain our city parks to improve the variety and quality of open space in New London. I am particularly interested in making basic improvements that have a positive impact on everyday life, and would prioritize funding for projects of this sort. Many studies have already been conducted that can guide how we can proceed to implement these improvements.

- 3) Are you currently, or have you ever been a union member? If yes when and where?

Unfortunately, no. I have been involved in a few unsuccessful organizing efforts. Early childhood education is a field that has been resistant to unions, but also a perfect example of why unions are important. Due to the low wages, poor benefits, and frequently difficult work conditions, there is tremendous turnover (close to 30% annually in many programs), which affects the quality of care and adds to the stresses faced by children and families.

- 4) Under what conditions would you support privatization of municipal services?

For the most part, I oppose privatizing services that provide "public goods" because (1) anticipated savings are often not realized and (2) public accountability is compromised. Any potentials for consolidation or privatization should be examined on a case-by-case basis: I would certainly want to know if savings due to lower wages at the labor level will be offset by the contractor's profit margin. While on the Board of Education, I voted against replacing union VNA school nurses with non-union privately-contracted ones (through Delta-T).

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5) In the past campaign promises were made and then not followed through on. What is your stance on campaign promises and when would you not follow through on a campaign promise you made?

I guess that's a good reason to be reluctant to make promises before all the facts are available on any issue. That said, on the campaign trail it is a temptation to want to tell people what they'd like to hear. I invite all individuals to communicate with their representatives (whether on Council or Board of Ed) and to speak at public meetings, to make sure their concerns will not be forgotten after the election.

6) In 1975, legislation was passed which required that disputes between management and firefighters be resolved through mediation, fact finding and binding arbitration.

A) What is your position regarding employees having a right to collectively bargain for their wages, hours, benefits and their working conditions?

I support the right of employees to collectively bargain for their wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions.

B) What is your position on restoring fairness and equity to the collective bargaining process including the binding arbitration process by reverting to the pre-1990 statute?

I believe that binding arbitration should be applied equally to all parties in a negotiation. Fair is fair.

7) Will you publicly support the rights and ongoing existence of Unions in New London?

I believe that every worker deserves to be a party to the terms of the contract under which s/he will be working. Most often, unions are the best means to ensure this right. I have in the past occasionally joined picket lines to demonstrate solidarity with the workers and their goals.

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8) How do you feel the current city government is working? What changes would you work towards to improve the operations of the city?

I was a strong supporter of the switch to a mayoral form of government, and I still believe it is preferable to our previous system. We have admittedly experienced some bumpiness during this transition period. One change I would advocate for is adoption of district representation for City Council, which I believe would help differentiate between the roles of the Mayor and the Councilors, and may provide greater responsiveness to New Londoners in parts of the city that are frequently underrepresented.

9) Currently there is a committee looking into the feasibility of building a community center in New London.

What are your thoughts, Pros and Cons of this idea?

As I hinted in a previous response, my focus is more on basic improvements than on big projects. The community center has the potential to be a great asset for New London, but I do have some concerns. The potential loss of Veterans Field as an open space, the future disposition of the Martin Center, and the accessibility of the center to all New Londoners are all issues that would have to be resolved to my satisfaction. Unfortunately, New London in the past has supported some big projects that seemed to have great potential but turned out to be harmful, so I am committed to learning as much as possible and teasing out "the devil in the details" before making a final judgment on the community center plan.

10) What is your biggest concern with the New London Fire Department?

As a New London taxpayer and potential Councilor, my biggest concern is that the NLFD frequently runs over its annual budget. I would not necessarily wish to reduce the department's operating costs, but I would like to see them predicted more accurately. This would help with planning the entire city budget, and also inspire more taxpayer confidence in the process.