

Setting the Record Straight

Patrick Kuehl

When I decided to run for Common Council, I did so at the request of multiple permanent residents of Ward Four. Throughout this process, I have been open and honest with the people of Ithaca.

When I was first approached about running by residents of Ward Four, I was told about the tactics used by the slate to suppress opposition, the lack of communication between representatives and their constituents, and how frustrated they were with the lack of action on the items that their representatives campaigned on.

I moved to Ithaca in 2019 and took time off from school during the pandemic to avoid online classes. I became an EMT and served Ithaca responding to emergencies in the midst of the COVID crisis. I worked at Bangs Ambulance for just under three years and was on the organizing committee for the successful union drive. I treated countless Cornell students, Ithaca community members, and residents of Tompkins County. I've responded to everything from falls and fractures to the suicides and overdoses of Cornell students and community members alike. I have been there for this community.

I am writing this piece because, in reading the news, the narrative about this election has been twisted. I have spoken to the press and others about my thoughts on Ithaca's politics, but unfortunately, my position has been drastically misrepresented. I am here to set the record straight by outlining the sequence of events leading up to the election and clearly stating my policy positions.

First, a clear timeline of what happened:

Late June: I was approached for the first time by members of the Ithaca community looking to see if I was interested in running against Jorge Defendini in Ward Four. I declined and asked that they look for other candidates who were sure they would be in Ithaca for the entirety of the four-year term.

Mid-September: I was approached by community members for a second time. They had not found another willing candidate who shared their values and still wanted me to run despite my lack of certainty about my plans after graduation, citing their continual frustration, a lack of communication, and significant inaction from the solidarity slate and Jorge Defendini specifically. I was still not convinced that this was a commonly held belief among students and permanent residents, so I began canvassing to better understand the viewpoints of residents in the Ward.

Late-September: Given my engagement in Ithaca politics I was actively on the lookout for a student residing in Ward Five who would be interested in running. I spoke with one of Jonathon Mong's sources for the Cornell Daily Sun article published on November 13, who discussed his organizing background in Florida and his previous experience in the military. I thought he would be a good person to represent Cornell students in Ward Five and approached him about running for the seat.

After much deliberation he agreed to run for the position.

Early October: I was still not committed to running but continued to canvas and gather people's opinions on the current political climate in Ward Four. During this time, I continued to support Clyde Lederman's campaign. Jonathon Mong's source told him that I was announcing my campaign on October 15, 2023 at an informational session for students interested in supporting Clyde's campaign. This was incorrect; a copy of the email is below.

Hello all,

Patrick Kuehl and I are hosting a quick info session tomorrow night at 7:00pm in 150 Warren Hall about how you can help boost student turnout ahead of the general election in November - now four weeks away.

Cornell students this November will decide control of 40% of the seats on the Ithaca City Council. The Council, among other things, oversees TCAT operations and can regulate the rental market in Collegetown, which is why we want to turn students out to vote.

If you have any questions, please reach out to me at

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I look forward to seeing you,

October 11, 2023: Jonathan Mong texted me and asked if I was running for Common Council. I responded, and texted him that I had not yet decided to run, and asked where he heard that I was entering the race. He responded. I then called Jonathon and explained that I had been approached about it but had no current plans of running. I then called Jonathon's source and explained my position.

October 15, 2023: This was the planned date of the aforementioned event intended to increase student engagement with elections. Due to scheduling conflicts, this event fell through and was not rescheduled.

Week of October 22, 2023: I agreed to run for Common Council. I made sure that everyone my supporters and I talked to understood that I was unsure of whether I would remain in Ithaca after graduation.

Late October and Early November: I campaigned aggressively with my supporters, talking to hundreds of people and knocking on every permanent resident's door in Ward Four.

November 7, 2023, Election Day: Many people offered to volunteer and explain the process of a write-in campaign to voters who were unable to be contacted before election day for various reasons. All volunteers stood more than 100 feet away from polling places and explained who I was and the process of a write-in campaign. I have been truthful and transparent about how I came to run this write-in campaign. I was under no obligation to inform Jorge Defendini of my decision to run a write-in campaign and I am proud that my efforts have helped to shine a spotlight on the numerous shortcomings of the solidarity slate.

Throughout my time in Ithaca I have worked hard to connect with this community. I have seen countless opportunities for change but a few of my main priorities are as follows.

Road and Winter Maintenance/Infrastructure: Winter roads in Ithaca, and specifically Collegetown, are treacherous by car and foot affecting both accessibility and public safety. Unfortunately, since city workers are both understaffed and overworked, I have served alongside many of these individuals and have met them through joint labor meetings. I understand the importance of supporting our workers first. If elected, I would advocate for Ithaca to apply for grant opportunities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other federal programs for infrastructure that works for the people of Ithaca. These grants will be competitive, but as an alderperson I will fight to ensure that we secure funding to repair our infrastructure without raising your taxes.

Effective Neighborhoods: Collegetown should be a vibrant home for students and permanent residents alike. By focusing on walkability, pedestrian safety, and urban design — utilizing the resources at the Art, Architecture, and Planning School at Cornell — Collegetown can and should be one of the premier college neighborhoods in the nation.

Zoning: Zoning in Collegetown is non-functional. With both land-use and form-based zoning requirements, the only developers that are able to build are wealthy private equity groups. This, in turn, makes rents significantly higher than they should be and creates effective oligopolies in new development in Collegetown. We must update our zoning laws and find creative ways to expand opportunities to build diverse types of housing.

Housing: The rental rates in Ithaca are the second highest out of any small city in America. Many students must sign their leases a full year ahead of their start date and pay over \$1000 in rent to even hope for decent housing. We are being displaced further down the hill, in turn pushing out long-term residents. We have to build affordable housing (with updated zoning) and push back on wealthy private development groups.

The City of Ithaca can and should make rent more affordable. 20% of units are eligible for city-implemented rent control. By passing rent-control legislation, the Common Council can stop the sharp increases of 10-15% in rent each year which predominantly affect low-income families and make it harder to live in our city.

TCAT: The TCAT is extremely underfunded and understaffed. We need to first ensure that our public transportation system is accessible to all, especially those who rely on it to get to work and class. We should work towards making it free, but what's the benefit of free public transportation if it's not reliable to the people who need it most?

Emergency response: As an EMT and a former employee of Bangs Ambulance, I have treated hundreds of Ithaca community members. I have seen significant problems with our current resources being able to meet the needs of all city residents. The only ambulance company that serves Ithaca is Bangs Ambulance, a private for-profit ambulance company that makes money off of the emergencies of our residents. We can change this.

I hope to bring realistic, effective, and imaginative solutions that address the real problems faced by Ithacans. While I agree with many of the slate's official stances, I hope to close the gap between promised actions and realized outcomes that has been endemic to Ward Four under Jorge Defendini and the slate.

I do not know what the election results will be today. I am incredibly grateful to the residents of Ward Four and leaders in the Ithaca community who supported this campaign. I hope that, if nothing else, this has brought attention to the heinous tactics used to intimidate and disrupt the lives of those who stand in opposition to the status quo. Alderperson Kumar's car was vandalized, I have come under fire for policy positions I don't even hold, and numerous former and current residents of the city of Ithaca have spoken to me about how they have been slandered and bullied by the slate.

While it is not easy to see through the electronic eye, I am incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support from friends and strangers alike who have thanked me and continued to encourage me. You are the people who have kept me going.