



Don Francino – Looking to keep representing Ward 3 PART 2

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter

The Palisade Center has had its share of controversies and problems. Along with the possibility of mixed use, what else is going on with the mall?

“As much as people may not like it, all right, they are making money hand over fist down there. It’s a cash cow. It was a big shot for Pyramid to lose it, and they lost their premier place up in Syracuse, which I went to visit, Destiny USA, because that had a hotel connected to it and that’s phenomenal when they do that. I thought Lord and Taylor was going to become a performing arts center. Not every night of every week, but just 3 nights on the weekends, not serving any food, just doing performing arts because they lost the Westchester Premiere Theater and here they could do it, in Lord and Taylor and then eat at the restaurants within the mall, but the mall wasn’t anxious because Lord Taylor is still paying rent on their lease, so they’ve got an empty store, but they’re making money.”

He added, that’s what it’s all about. Unfortunately it’s, money makes the world go around.

You were talking about the mall and the idea of mixed use. Now you’re saying that the current owners are on board with doing mixed use? Are they talking a hotel? They’re talking housing and hotel?

“Originally it was a hotel with Lord and Taylor, converting that to a hotel and making casino runs across the bridge to Empire City. Empire City is in the process of doubling their size. I don’t know where all this money comes from, but they’re increasing and doubling their size. From the Palisade Center to Empire City, it’s a 20-minute run and they’ve got the designated bus lane on the bridge, so not a big deal. Whatever happens with the future of Lord and Taylor, something’s going to happen there, if it’s tied into Empire City, a hotel, and tie in the casino runs to the hotel, and run the buses across the bridge, but certainly the residential portion on the other side of the mall where Macy’s is.”

It has an L-shaped section there that’s where they already got the infrastructure in the ground to build residential housing out toward 59 and it’s up to them. They can’t push them. Francino said that the town can only do so much. If they come before them and it goes through the process and they’re zoned for it, they don’t have to hold a public hearing. They just get to go ahead and go, certainly the school districts want more children their schools. The population has been depressed.

“If you ran it like the apartments and has children in there, that’s the foundation for the future of Clarkstown for them to come out of those apartments and go into the homes.”

How is the town dealing with the illegal immigrant problem in Clarkstown?

“Thank God we got the code enforcers who, I just requested an update on the homes that I’ve turned in because when I knock on the door and I look at the windows and there’s sheets hanging on the windows, you know that’s an issue, so that that house has to be looked into. I do that and, and I turn it over to code enforcement. I know two homes in Nanuet that were purchased by an LLC, and we knew who the LLC was, but because of our code enforcement and they’re relentless. Pushing them to be legal. They keep issuing fines. They couldn’t take it anymore. The landlords gave up on the house and sold them, and they sold as single family homes. Because they don’t pay the fines, we lien the property. If the fines add up to 300,000 or 400,000. That’s not going away.”

They’re going to have to pay that whether it be right away or when you sell the house, but they will keep it up and keep enforcement up once they get, a judgment that this has to be corrected and they go out and check every 3 months and it’s not corrected, that’s another fine we place on the property. He doesn’t care. You want to keep it that way, we’ll add those fines up to 100,000 and then when eventually you sell they’re going to take that money because they can’t get around it, it’s a lien on the property.

<https://youtu.be/5KBpFyi5Pig>

Another major thing that, one side of the political spectrum is screaming about his government accountability. When they are not in power they keep saying that government’s got to be held accountable for what they do. How is the Clarkstown board holding itself accountable to the residents of Clarkstown?

“Transparency, basically, we were just audited by Albany. We got the highest marks that you can get when they audited us that our finances are second to none. I come up with a person running for supervisor. That he’s got multiple judgments against him and his salary was garnished to pay back all the debts that he has. You have been in Clarkstown, yeah. That would be, Bondar. Yeah, I was shocked. I said to my son, this is what George told me, that he has multiple judgments against him. He says he’s got judgments against him from all these banks, because he doesn’t pay. One bank went so far as to garnish his salary.

It’s a matter of public record and I said to George, there’s no way he should even be running for office to be CFO in the town and he’s got a shitty financial track record.

“In my Business you would never be hired if you have judgments against you, you’ve already gone through the court system, the judgments are set, even one of the, I think it was a bank garnished his salary to get paid back and this man wants to be fiduciary, the CFO of the Town of Clarkstown doesn’t cut it. I don’t care what political party you are. It just doesn’t cut it. I said, George, the people have to know if this is the case. I found his judgments. My son found them and listed to them for me.”

“As far as the Town of Clarkstown finances, we have debt. That’s how they do business. They file bonds or whatever, but we’ve paid down so much debt. I mean within the next, I think 8 years, we’ll have zero debt. We’re going to have zero debt because our job was to attract businesses to the town which pay taxes more than you pay. It goes into our bottom line and we have surplus. We pay down our debt. We’re going to have to bond for police cars and that type of thing. That’s necessities. Yes, that’s normal. We’re not bonding just for the sake of bonding. No, we’re not bonding for parks. We have all the parks we need. We have all the open space. We’ve done all of that.”

“Now we’re renovating some of the ball fields. The ball fields of Lake Nanuet I built. I didn’t depend on the town because we were growing so fast. By the time the town moved on it, it was Charlie Holbrook at the time. I said, Charlie, I’ll clear the land and I’ll build the fields because I’m getting financial support from the business community and I’ll get it done and we did. Those fields are owned by the Nanuet Little League, not by the town of Clarkstown.”

He says their financial stability is there, no question about it. They’ve got the highest bond rate.

So, what are you doing to make the government accountable to the people? You got the rating done. You got the audit done, but how is the, how is the general public knowing about all of this?

“They’re not going to because they don’t pay attention. When we have a town board meeting, we publish all of this, there’s 3 people in the audience. That’s it.

We broadcast it. We televise it, but the public just doesn’t, if they’re not showing up, I said, George, the public doesn’t show they’re happy that we’re doing a good job.

If we're not doing a good job, they're going to show up and complain. The few that do and say taxes, taxes, taxes. I brought up my tax bill. A good 30 to 40% of my tax bill is school taxes, not town, not county, but school taxes, but they don't show up at school board meetings either. Leave it status quo, people are happy, they're willing to pay for the convenience they have of being here and the safety."

"I go back to that. They're willing to pay to know that their children are safe and they're being educated. Once they move on, then we expect the new people to come in and buy the houses and do the same thing with their children."

I know there's a weekly newsletter that the town puts out to people. In these newsletters that go out, is that where everything's explained to the people?

"George holds these call in sessions. Tele town halls. He asks me if I want to attend? I tell him, George, you're the CEO. You're doing that. You're communicating with the people. There may be 3000 people signed on. That's how you're communicating with them, you know, and telling them what's going on within the town. I'm not going to duplicate that. There's no reason to."

He says that since this is a political season, you get these people that are calling in that are political hacks trying to trip him up. The best thing that ever happened was George becoming supervisor. He worked for me when I was doing the playgrounds in Nanuet. Nothing against George he's a busy man. There's no way he can do all that he's doing and expect to help him with the playground. It's impossible. He can't do it. He gave him the accolades and the whole bit but run the town. That's what he does best.

"A lot of the public got upset when George was considering running for State Senate, he got pounded into the ground by people upset that he was going to run for State Senate, so he didn't, and I'll bring up term limits. I pushed that because the public never had a say. In term limits, just had a 5-member board vote it through and you can't do that. The courts agreed and said you have to have the public decide what your term limits are. You just can't vote it in and say, *'Well, here it is, and the public has no say.'*

<https://youtu.be/105w1gAYzgg>

There's moratorium on building. I know it's a temporary one. With the need for housing, why put a moratorium on building?

"Because what they're going to, it's not a moratorium. There's, there's certain projects that were exempt to that.

They've already gone through their approval process, and this is mainly in the TOD in Nanuet. Everything's in place. They haven't put a shovel in the ground yet for around the railroad tracks. For this moratorium to be in place, it's hurting nobody, even the developers because they're not ready to go.

Yeah, this is your 5th term, I think you said? Why should people put you back in? Why should people vote for you over the Democrat running against you?

"If they look at my record outside of town hall, which I'm going to put on the Internet, all the things that I've done for the community. I did the playground twice, if you know the High View playground, I did the ball fields at Lake Nanuet. I did things for the community. I did the United Way and golf outings. I did everything, Everything's in place. There's nothing you have to do just handle the issues that come up, handle the illegal housing, that crop up."

The town is financially sound, but what's your record that people would say, hey, you know what? He may be older, but what have you initiated for Ward 3 and the town itself, but specifically Ward 3, that people say, hey, you know what, he's really improved our quality of life.

"Ward three is mainly a commercial area. We have our apartments. We have our single-family homes. I take care of the infrastructure within. People call me, e-mail me, whatever their concern is, is handled the same day when I receive the complaint, I do not sit on anything. I handle it right away. I respond, I'm not someone who just takes the job and said, hey, I'm not calling anybody back, and I don't do that. That's not in my persona, and people know that people that were with me when I built all the infrastructure that I did build, at not at taxpayer expense. It was all done with private funds. I didn't raise anybody's taxes. That's the type of service that I did.

"If you think that I can continue in this position, keep the town's feet to the metal, pressed to the metal, absolutely. If you have people that are knocking on your doors that shouldn't be, they know to call me. They know what my response will be, and they know I have no patience for people breaking the law at all under any circumstance, and I react to it, and they know that. I'll say the people have been good to me. When they have a concern, they contact me and I make sure it's taken care of."

He added that he was as an Allstate agent. He was there for 50 years, forget about being the insurance agent. He was a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a marriage counselor, you name it, when he counseled the customers that came into his office for that. He transferred that over to this position that when someone contacts him and needs something done, he'll do his level best to make sure it's done. If they don't think he's capable of doing it anymore because of his age, he'll will step aside.

"I'm still fully with it and have no issues physically or mentally, so I'm still able to do the job and I will do the job. What are they looking for in me? When they see me up at the town board, I was criticized by one person that I'm smiling. I said, what do you want me to do?"

What is it about Francino that people should keep him in office?

<https://youtu.be/Rafr1wMpLlk>