

## The Sign War: Do Lawn Signs Matter?

It's that time of the year again. The time when our lawns and roadsides turn red, white and blue (and a smattering of green) with campaign signs.

Depending on your point of view, the signs are valuable ways to build support for a candidate — or they're visual pollution and litter that should, at a minimum, be restricted. (The right to display temporary election signs is protected by the First Amendment and any town regulations restricting their use would have to be carefully crafted.)

Do lawn signs really make a difference?

According to two professors of political science at Vanderbilt University, <http://news.vanderbilt.edu/2011/07/campaign-signs/>, lawn signs are especially helpful in what they call "low profile" elections where voters either don't know the candidates very well or know little about the candidates. Name recognition, the researchers conclude, conveys a distinct advantage on the candidate who has more signs as voters perceive candidates with more familiar names to be more viable.

That was certainly the case in the 2011 town justice race when an unknown challenger papered the town with his signs leading to the defeat of the low key incumbent who managed to put up a few signs in the waning days of the campaign.

Do you agree with the importance of name recognition?

When you see more signs for a candidate, does that automatically make you think the person is the better candidate?

Another argument in support of the "more signs the better" theory is that lawn signs increase voter turnout by reminding the public that there's an election. This is especially important, the theory goes, in non-presidential and non-gubernatorial years when voter turnout drops off significantly.

But this theory can be argued both ways. While in general, increasing voter turnout is a positive, more signs for candidate A may remind supporters of candidate B that they had better get to the polls to insure that their candidate wins.

And while name recognition may be one way to pick a candidate, whatever happened to voting based on knowing what a candidate stands for? Or how he's performed on the job?

Where do the candidates in this year's election stand on some of the controversial issues currently before our Town Board?

- the future of the highway garage
- allowing the Winery to use town-owned land for parking
- the integrity of the town's Ethics Law
- collecting unpaid taxes
- the future of the Holland Sporting Club and Shallow Creek park sites
- future commercial development along Route 202 and in other parts of town

- allowing property owners to start construction without a building permit

You can't get that kind of information from a sign.

But the information **IS** out there — if you look for it — and if you want to cast an informed vote. A vote based on more than just name recognition.

Here are some suggestions on where and how you can learn more about the candidates so that you can compare and contrast their vision for Yorktown as well as their on-the-job performance.

- Ask questions. When the candidates knock on your door, engage them in conversation. Prepare one or two questions on the town issue/s that is most important to you.
- Attend candidate debates. Watch the newspapers for the dates; at least two are anticipated.
- Take advantage of the two free weekly newspapers to learn about what's happening in town — your town.
- Watch Town Board meetings, either on TV (channel 20 for Cablevision or channel 33 for FIOS), or online at the town's web site, [www.yorktownny.org](http://www.yorktownny.org) (scroll to the bottom of the page for the meeting video archive).
- Learn more about how the candidates have dealt with an array of town issues over the past 20 months, from resident complaints to taxes. Check out [www.ciynfo.org](http://www.ciynfo.org) for Town Board discussions on more than 50 different town topics.

When it comes to voting for the people who will control a \$51 million budget and the future of our community, what's more important: signs or substance?