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Kingston mayoral candidates Noble and Polacco hold first debate

KINGSTON – The two candidates for mayor of Kingston held their first debate at the Ulster County Chamber of Commerce breakfast Tuesday, articulating their differences in policy towards building the city's future. Republican Ron Polacco is challenging Democrat Steve Noble for the chance to manage the municipality for the next four years.

"I know that I'm going to work really hard, and be able to represent you to the best of my ability, and represent all of our interests, by being a good listener and a strong advocate, and be able to create a community that we all want to live in," Noble said. He praised the county's economic development efforts, promising to closely partner with a similar approach.

Polacco took a more conservative and critical approach, describing a city at risk of decay. "My experience on the common council showed me, that the only way that city officials saw fit to take care of the obligations of the city was on the backs of the taxpayers. There was no outside the box thought process on reigning in spending, controlling the budget, generating revenue," he said.

Noble advocated a 10-year plan to equalize the tax rates for residential and commercial property, as proposed by Dr. Gerald Benjamin of SUNY New Paltz. "It's something that we all can plan and budget for," he noted. Noble questioned whether state assistance would be available. "This is going to be a problem that we may have to solve on our own," he said. "We need to work with Albany," Polacco responded.



Polacco and Noble shake hands before the debate

Polacco took a stand against a bicycle lane on Broadway, claiming it would hinder parking for businesses. "You already have a difficult time getting down Broadway, especially during rush hour. So how's it going to be when we take out two lanes of traffic, for these bike lanes," Polacco argued. "The Building a Better Broadway project is a critical piece of re-inventing Midtown," Noble countered. "This project will completely re-synchronize and replace all of the lights along Broadway," he said.

Both candidates supported the referendum to change the city charter, allowing Kingston's mayor and common council to sign off on water resource sales to outside entities. Widespread protests earlier this year opposed a proposed private bottling plant. Under the current rules the water commission has exclusive authority over the supply.

Outgoing Mayor Shayne Gallo's 2016 budget proposal contains a 4.9 percent tax increase, which both candidates take umbrage over. "I do not find it to be acceptable. We have the same status quo, the same mindset, for twenty years – raise taxes," Polacco said. "The devil is always in the details," agreed Noble. "This is a very unique budget, drastically different from previous years, it should be concerning to many of us," Noble added. "We all want to have good quality services, but we need to make sure we're not taxed out of our homes," he said.

Regarding business development, Noble tipped his hat towards his defeated primary opponent, the outgoing. "The prior administration did some good things about getting the job done for Midtown, and supporting our local businesses," he said, adding he's prepared to continue that work.

"Everyone in this room can tell me something that's wrong with Kingston," Polacco said. "We have to change that mindset to everyone telling me something that's wonderful about Kingston. I strongly believe there's nothing wrong with Kingston that can't be fixed with what's right with Kingston."

Polacco called for a kinder gentler parking enforcement process. "It sends the wrong message, that when you come to Kingston, shop, go dining, go to the bank, and you come out there's a ticket on your car, because you were five minutes late. We don't want to have that kind of impact on people; we want a carefree shopping atmosphere."

Noble proposed a parking plan, managed by a parking authority. "What works for Uptown may not work for Midtown, and what works for Midtown may not work for Downtown," he said, noting that a garage might be too expensive for the city.

The next debate takes place Thursday October 22 at Temple Emanuel on Albany Avenue, at 7 p.m.

