

**As a non-partisan group of concerned citizens,
VeRSE (Vestal Residents for Safe Energy), offered all three of the
candidates for the two open positions on the Vestal Town Board
the opportunity to answer the six questions below.**

Shoba Agneshwar and John Fletcher provided the following responses:

1) What will you do to protect our air, water, and land from contamination to foster good health of Vestal residents?

Shoba Agneshwar: Through regulation and enforcement, the Town of Vestal actively protects our natural resources (air, land, water) not only for its citizens, but for future generations. Air: passed a resolution that eliminates all smoking in Town of Vestal Parks; Land: protect the environment from pollutants and contamination by enforcing all DEC and MS4 storm water regulations; Water: constantly testing and monitoring Vestal's 6 groundwater wells to deliver the best quality drinking water

John Fletcher: Public safety and health — a cornerstone of my campaign — should also be a top Town Board priority, since it's crucial to attracting and retaining residents and commercial interests. My personal interest in environmental safety began as a 1960s child growing up in Vestal, and I still participate in health surveys based on water and well studies. Through continued education and community engagement we can facilitate environmentally-safe natural resources for our families.

2) What is your position in respect to moving the Town of Vestal forward toward the use of renewable energy by Town government and residents?

Shoba Agneshwar: The goal of any alternate form of renewable energy is to provide the same or better way to deliver power efficiently with less carbon footprint. Real progress can be made if all the associated costs of such an alternate energy source become economically feasible. If the costs of delivering wind/solar energy decrease over time, then towns such as Vestal could benefit from joining other municipalities in providing alternate forms of renewable energy to our residents.

John Fletcher: Renewable energy being an economic issue, as well as an environmental one, aligns with the Board's fiscal responsibility. As the advancing technologies become more cost-effective, they create opportunities for growth and improved sustainability. The Board should pro-actively seek renewable energy opportunities, evaluating impact studies and completing risk/return analyses. Local experts, community members and Universities can provide valuable input to determine what would serve our community's best interests.

3) How do you plan to engage citizens in creating a vibrant, sustainable Vestal community?

Shoba Agneshwar: In order to create a vibrant and sustainable community, there needs to be a real commitment from Town leaders that this indeed is a priority. As your town representative, I am committed to working with residents, our local business and our respective department heads to ensure that all ideas and resources are utilized to create such a community. To that end, we are working with VINES to establish a community garden that would benefit Vestal.

John Fletcher: Community engagement starts with education, at earlier ages, teaching youth the importance of management and sustainability, and the role it plays in their future. Second is transparent communications. Town Halls can engage the community in open dialogue, gathering information to make decisions which are business-justified and in the town's best interest. I would also push to form a new Community Board Committee or Lay Board to foster improved communications. Lastly, expanded Front Street Days!

4) How can the Board best shape the Town's future in responding to private interests that may not serve the community?

Shoba Agneshwar: While we need to encourage business coming into Vestal and increase our productivity and tax-base, we must also work with private businesses to ensure that our environment and quality of life is protected at all times. There can be no exception in this. We can all agree that no one business or industry should be allowed to contaminate Vestal purely for profit and endanger our quality of life factors for future generations.

John Fletcher: No Board candidate or official should take contributions from special interests. The Board can best shape the town's future by responding to private interests through transparency and open discussion, with no hidden agendas. Elect individuals out of commitment to the community, not a personal agenda! Finding balance between business, private interests and positive development of the community is a difficult, but necessary, conversation to assure that actions are justified and in the town's best interests.

5) How will you foster effective communication between and among Vestal residents and their Town board?

Shoba Agneshwar: I will continue to do what I have demonstrated in my first term as your town representative, which is: Respond to all email questions; return all phone calls; meet individually with home-owners to respond to their specific concerns; speak to neighborhoods when "quality of life" issues are being affected. When issues arise, all residents want to know that they can reach out to their elected representative who is willing to come and listen to them.

John Fletcher: Similar to #3, holding regular Town Hall forums and implementing a new Board Committee where the community has a voice. Define a course of action to address public concerns in an open and transparent environment. This is key to continued growth, development and sustainability. Communication through collaboration on improvement opportunities is a critical component of defining a successful business model. With transparency comes trust and with trust comes establishing Vestal's identity.

6) Do you favor having the Town of Vestal opt out of the New York State solar panel property tax exemption, and if so, how do you think doing so would benefit the community?

Shoba Agneshwar: Currently, residents who install solar panels at their homes will not see their property assessments increase or decrease; thus making the need for an "exemption" a moot point. The environmental benefits and the savings in utility cost/consumption vs. the installation, maintenance, repair and subsequent removal/disposal costs of the solar panels is a decision that individual home owners need to make.

John Fletcher: This is a complex issue. I do not currently have the relevant facts and data to make an informed decision on what the community impacts (benefits or detriments) are for Vestal, specific to the NYS solar panel property tax exemption. While I support exploring renewable energy projects as a community, it would be irresponsible of me to draw a personal opinion before seeing the Town's business case outlining regulatory and fiduciary commitments and impacts.