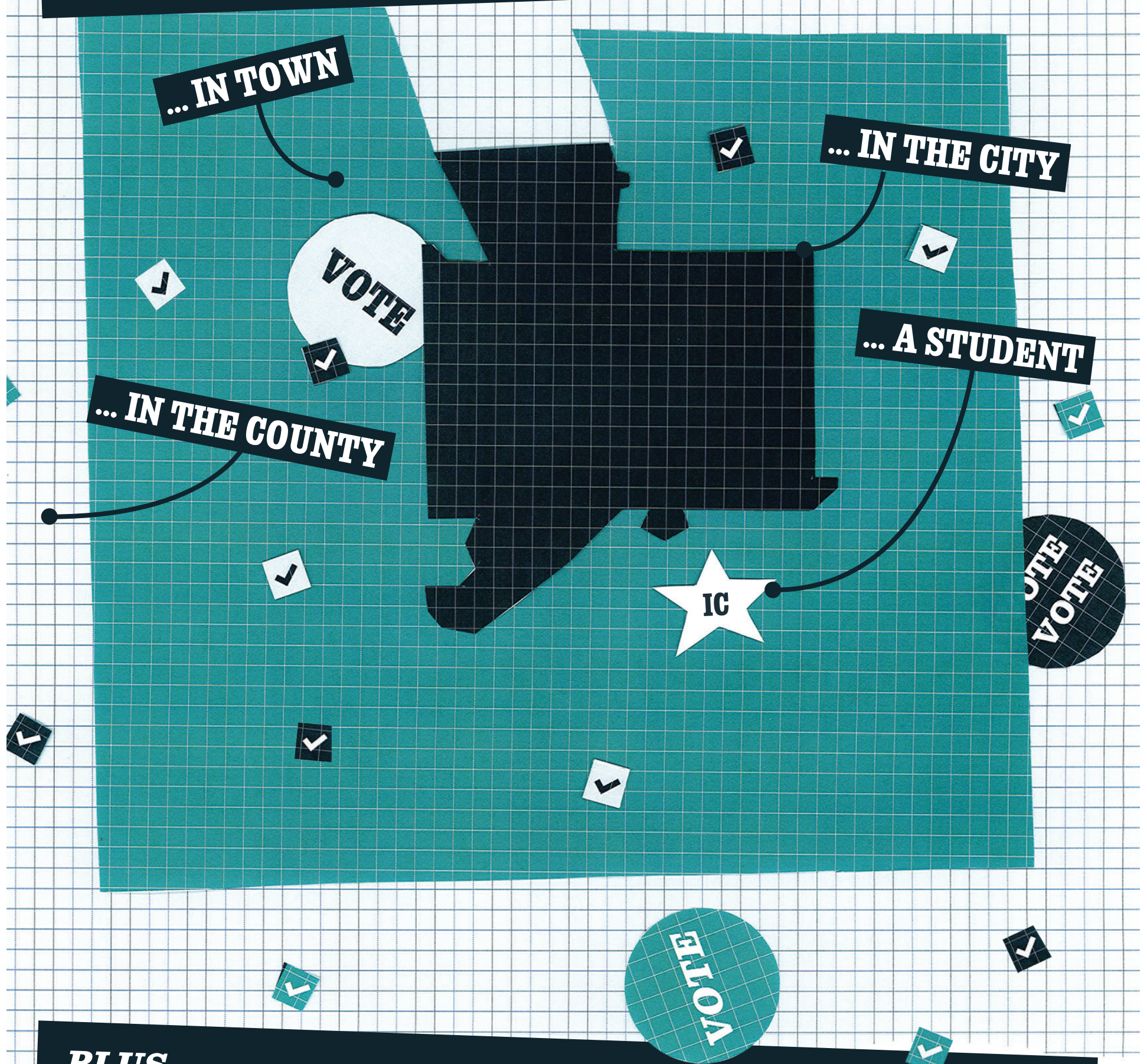


# WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ITHACA POLITICS?

***THE ITHACAN'S* GUIDE TO THE NOV. 4  
GENERAL ELECTION IF YOU ARE ...**



## ***PLUS***

**Campus sees lower engagement in local election • Page 5**

**New York state Proposition 1 to legalize sports complex • Page 6**

**Locals upset with Rep. Josh Riley's support for Israel • Page 6**

THE PARK CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA (PCIM) IS HOSTING  
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### ? WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND GENERAL?

On June 24, voters in Tompkins County voted in the primary election that would decide who would be on the ballot for the general election in November. This vote helps narrow down the candidates in each party to prevent parties from splitting on candidates if there are more candidates in one party than another.

The 2025 primary election in Tompkins County resulted in largely predicted winners for the general election because not many races had candidates from parties other than the Democratic Party. The primary election decides between candidates of the same party, while the general election decides between candidates across parties. In Ithaca, because many races had candidates from the same party, the winner of the primary election will be the winner of the general election if no one runs as a write-in or a party that is not in the primary.

### ? WHO CAN I VOTE FOR AS AN ITHACA COLLEGE STUDENT?

Students at IC are eligible to vote in Tompkins County Legislative District 14 which is part of the Town of Ithaca. This means students registered to vote with their on-campus address can vote for Democratic candidate Christy Bianconi '02 or the People First Party candidate Michelle Wright for county legislator for District 14, and Jim Salk for Town Justice. Voters also must vote for three councilpersons which include Rob Rosen, Diana Sinton and David McCune. For all candidates, voters can also opt to write in a person instead.

### ? WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TOWN AND CITY OF ITHACA?

The Town of Ithaca and the City of Ithaca are two separate municipalities. The City of Ithaca makes up the center of Ithaca and is made up of five wards, each with a representative on the city’s Ithaca Common Council. The Town of Ithaca forms a larger square around the city and is governed by the Town Board.

The two parts of Ithaca are generally one community, sharing a school district and many municipal services.

### ? I DON’T LIVE HERE, WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Many aspects of life in Ithaca are informed by local elected officials. In many ways, local politicians and political systems have much more of an effect on people’s daily lives than federal level politicians. Both the Ithaca Common Council and Tompkins County Legislature set budgets and important guidelines around the spending of money.

The Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, road quality, local laws, public and health services and more are all under their jurisdiction. Additionally, local government advocacy and participation can create observable change in communities.

### ? WHERE AND HOW CAN I VOTE ON ELECTION DAY?

People over the age of 18 are eligible to vote in the Nov. 4 election if they register online at [Elections.NY.Gov/Register-Vote](https://Elections.NY.Gov/Register-Vote) before Oct. 25.

Those who are registered to vote in Tompkins County can visit a local poll for their respective legislative district on Election Day which can be identified at [VoterLookup.Elections.NY.gov/](https://VoterLookup.Elections.NY.gov/).

Ithaca College students registered to vote with their college address can vote at Longview Senior Living.

Early voting is available from Oct. 25 through Nov. 2 at the Town of Ithaca Town Hall and the Crash Fire Rescue building. Voting is available at those locations from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day except Oct. 28 and Oct. 30, when it is open from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. Anyone who wants to vote in their hometown election with their home address can apply for an absentee ballot before Oct. 25 and mail it in with time to be post-marked before Nov. 4.

## ITHACA CITY COMMON COUNCIL



#### 🗳️ JORGE DEFENDINI, FIRST WARD

Jorge DeFendini won the June 24 primary election for the Democratic nomination against Alejandro Santana and Leon Holden and is opposing Republican nominee Zach Winn to represent the city’s 1st Ward on Ithaca’s Common Council. The 1st Ward includes Ithaca’s South and West Hill neighborhoods. DeFendini represented the 4th Ward on the Common Council in 2021. DeFendini is looking to address housing stability. DeFendini said stability would be achieved through the protection of affordable homes with rent caps and by strengthening rent stability laws, specifically in low-income areas.



#### 🗳️ JOE KIRBY, SECOND WARD

Joe Kirby won the primary election running unopposed for the Democratic nomination to represent the city’s 2nd Ward on Ithaca’s Common Council. The 2nd Ward consists of Ithaca’s downtown, Fall Creek neighborhood and a part of Collegetown. Kirby is an attorney and works with Tompkins County Treatment Court. Kirby is focused on increasing efficiency within the city’s politics, specifically addressing the city’s delayed audits. At a Q&A style forum in early September, Kirby said that the city was in “gridlock” and that its lack of action to address problems was affecting how the city operates.



#### 🗳️ ROBIN TRUMBLE, FOURTH WARD

Robin Trumble won the June 24 primary election running unopposed for the Democratic nomination to represent the city’s 4th Ward on Ithaca’s Common Council. The 4th Ward includes a large portion of Collegetown and Cornell University’s campus. Trumble, an experienced local service worker, has never held elected office before and was endorsed by the local chapter of the Progressive Working Families Party. He has done work as a field organizer with People For the American Way, and he had involvement in Ithacans for Reimagining Public Safety, which advocated for police reform.



#### 🗳️ ZACH WINN, FIRST WARD

Zach Winn won the June 24 primary election running unopposed for the Republican nomination to represent the city’s 1st Ward on Ithaca’s Common Council. The 1st Ward includes Ithaca’s South and West Hill neighborhoods. Winn will rival Jorge DeFendini to represent the 1st Ward. Winn previously ran as a Republican for 1st Ward in 2023 and ran for mayor in 2022. On the issue of public safety, Winn said that he would not want to redirect any of the police’s budget to social programs. Winn also said he wants a secured psychiatric drug and rehabilitation facility to help those struggling with addiction.



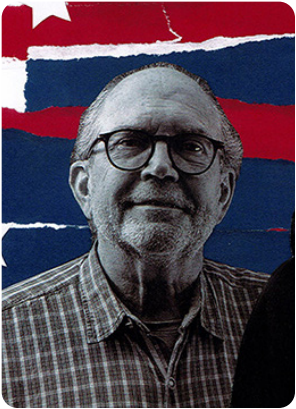
#### 🗳️ PAT SEWELL, THIRD WARD

Pat Sewell won the primary election against Bill Noseworthy, winning the Democratic nomination to represent the city of Ithaca’s 3rd Ward on Ithaca’s Common Council. The 3rd Ward encompasses Belle Sherman, as well as South Hill neighborhoods. Sewell ran in 2023 for a two-year seat in the 3rd Ward as an independent but lost to Democrat Pierre Saint-Perez. In 2024, Sewell petitioned for ranked choice voting; this petition was denied by the Ithaca City Clerk because the proposal did not address financial issues, but has led to working groups exploring the issue.



#### 🗳️ HANNAH SHVETS AND 🗳️ G.P. ZURENDA, FIFTH WARD

Democrat Hannah Shvets and independent G.P. Zurenda Jr. are both running for 5th Ward. This is the only race for the City of Ithaca’s Common Council left without a clear front-runner. Read more about this race on page 5.



# TOMPKINS COUNTY LEGISLATURE



🗳️ **TRAVIS BROOKS, DISTRICT 1**

Democrat Travis Brooks is running unopposed for reelection for Tompkins County Legislature District 1, which includes the City of Ithaca and Westside Ithaca. This will be his second term. Brooks said that over the next two years, the Tompkins County community could face challenges due to the current administration and that they are only beginning to see these challenges. Brooks said he wants to work with Tompkins County Department of Social Services and community agencies to collaborate on housing and food insecurity.



🗳️ **IRIS PACKMAN, DISTRICT 3**

Democrat Iris Packman is seeking election for District 3 Legislator of Tompkins County, which includes Coddington Street, Aurora Street, Hudson Place and Grandview Avenue. She won the primary vote June 24 with 64% against Pierre Saint-Perez. Packman is a life-long Ithaca resident and studied labor law and union organizing at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Later, she worked as a strategic campaigner for an international labor union and as a shop steward for her staff union.



🗳️ **JUDITH HUBBARD, DISTRICT 5**

Democrat Judith Hubbard is running unopposed for Tompkins County Legislature District 5. The fifth district consists of the Fall Creek and Cornell Heights neighborhoods, as well as parts of the Cornell University campus. Hubbard said she is focusing her campaign on county finances, taxes and environmental issues. As a natural scientist, Hubbard said she is concerned about the TeraWulf AI Data Center proposal in Lansing. She said AI data centers release carbon emissions into the air and emit carbon into Cayuga Lake.



🗳️ **DEBORA DAWSON, DISTRICT 7**

Deborah Dawson is running unopposed for reelection to the Tompkins County Legislature in District 7. Dawson said that her experience in the local government and with federal regulatory enforcement would be beneficial for the community. Dawson’s bid is a write-in one and former competitor John Dennis will be on the November ballot because he removed his bid too late to be removed. On Sept. 24, Dennis announced he was ending his bid. Both Dennis and a former third-party candidate, Joshua Jahani, have endorsed Dawson.



🗳️ **CHRISTY BIANCONI, DISTRICT 14**

Christy Bianconi '02 is a social worker running as the nominee from the Democratic and Working Families parties for District 14 of the Tompkins County Legislature. The district includes Ithaca College and Namgyal Monastery. Bianconi has lived and worked in the Town of Ithaca for 30 years. Her campaign is built around expanding mental health resources and housing affordability in Tompkins County. Bianconi said she is also a strong proponent of social justice and ensuring that the government works for all of its citizens.



🗳️ **MICHELLE WRIGHT, DISTRICT 14**

Michelle E. Wright is an administrative assistant running as an independent for the District 14 legislator seat in Tompkins County. The seat includes parts of South Hill, including Ithaca College Campus and Namgyal Monastery. She has held several positions in the local government of the town of Ulysses. As IC falls within the new District 14 map, Wright said she wants to put emphasis on working with IC students through a Constituent Advisory Council, even if they may be a less permanent part of the local community.



🗳️ **VERONICA PILLAR, DISTRICT 2**

Democrat Veronica Pillar is running unopposed for reelection for District 2 legislator of Tompkins County, which includes The Commons, Seneca Street, Green Street and Buffalo Street. This will be her second term. Pillar is the chair of the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Pillar said she wants to establish a space to hold natural conversations between the county government and the county’s people. Pillar said that she needs to solidify this idea but that it is one she wants to establish and leave behind as her legacy.



🗳️ **ADAM VINSON, DISTRICT 4**

Democrat Adam Vinson, a 2025 Cornell University graduate, is running unopposed for Tompkins County Legislature District 4. As a legislator for Tompkins County’s fourth district, he will oversee portions of East Ithaca, including parts of the Cornell campus with a large student population. Vinson said the key issues of his campaign include affordable housing, especially for college students, and shifting the direction to creating more affordable buildings. In addition, Vinson said he aims to secure funding for the Ithaca Green New Deal.



🗳️ **SHAWNA BLACK, DISTRICT 6**

Shawna Black is running unopposed for a chance at a third term in the Tompkins County Legislature. While she was previously a legislator for District 11, she is now running for District 6. Black served as chair of the Tompkins County Legislature for two years. Black said she supports efforts to help unhoused individuals through providing health services and utilizing various harm reduction tactics, like NARCAN. Black said that she believes that the county should invest in mental health services and ensure that there are enough providers.



🗳️ **JOHN HUNT, DISTRICT 12**

John Hunt is running for District 12 legislator of Tompkins County, which covers the Town of Ithaca, as well as parts of east Ithaca, parts of Cornell University’s campus and the South Hill area. Prior to running for office, Hunt worked as a researcher in geology at Cornell. Hunt is running unopposed as the Democratic Party nominee for the District 12 legislator race. Hunt was inspired to run for office as a county legislator after seeing the wide number of representatives retiring.

## OTHER DISTRICTS IN TOMPKINS COUNTY

Tompkins County Legislature Districts 1-7 represent the City of Ithaca.

! Tompkins County Legislature District 12 and District 14 represent the Town of Ithaca, including Ithaca College’s campus.

VOTE Tompkins County Legislature Districts 8-11, District 13 and Districts 15-16 represent surrounding towns in Tompkins County and are not included.

# ITHACA TOWN JUSTICE



🗳️ **JIM SALK, TOWN OF ITHACA**

Jim Salk '74 is an incumbent running unopposed as a Democrat for Ithaca Town Court Judge. Salk practiced transactional law for 20 years. Salk said he ran for town judge at the suggestion of one of his firm partners. The state-wide system of Town and Village Court is unique to the state of New York. Salk said this fact informs his work, alongside maintaining neutrality in all cases that come before his bench.

“Everybody who comes before me ... is a member of my community,” Salk said. “I have to listen to what’s going on and try to both be fair to the person who’s in front of me, but also be mindful that something’s happened that brought this person to my attention and the community needs to be protected as well.”

# Competitive race continues for 5th Ward seat

BY JULIAN DELUCIA

ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

After the primary elections in June, only one race for the City of Ithaca’s Common Council is left without a front-runner. This is the race in the 5th Ward between Democrat candidate Hannah Shvets, junior at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, and independent G.P. Zurenda, a psychotherapist and consultant.

Shvets defeated Zurenda and Deborah Fisher, who has since dropped out, in the Democratic primary with 40.49% of the vote. Zurenda received 33.74% and Fisher received 25.77%. Zurenda is running again in the general election as an independent.

Shvets has been living in Ithaca since 2016 when she moved from Austin, Texas, with her family. Shvets has been involved with community groups like the Ithaca Tenants Union.

Zurenda, often known by his nickname Gepe (pronounced Jeep), was raised in Elmira and has been living in Ithaca for nearly 40 years. He works as a psychotherapist, consultant and life coach but has a background in the manufacturing industry, which he said will help him as a councilperson. He has served on the Ithaca City Planning Board and was a founding member of Ithaca Community Recovery.

The 5th Ward contains much

of Cornell University’s North Campus, as well as residential, single-family neighborhoods in the Cornell Heights district and around Fall Creek, creating a demographic split between students and locals.

Shvets said Zurenda running again in the general election is undemocratic.

“He already ran in the primary, and he lost [and] I think that matters to a lot of people,” Shvets said.

Zurenda and Shvets both agree that key issues in the 5th Ward are the lack of housing and the unaffordable price of housing. The Fair Market Rent of a one-bedroom apartment in Ithaca has increased from \$1,127 in 2022 to \$1,489 in 2025, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Office of Policy Development and Research’s HUD User. According to the 2025 Tompkins County Living Wage Study, the gap between the New York state minimum wage and the Tompkins County living wage has increased from \$4.25 to \$9.32 from 2023 to 2025, a large increase in the cost of living.

Shvets said she wants to see more housing units built, but also better rent controls and tenant solidarity. She said she wants to work on fixing what she sees as an unbalanced power dynamic between the tenants,



After the primary elections, only one race for the City of Ithaca’s Common Council is left without a clear front-runner. This is the 5th Ward race between Democratic candidate Hannah Shvets and independent candidate G.P. Zurenda.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RAESSLER GUTHRIE/THE ITHACAN

property developers and landlords through coalition building and community organizing.

Zurenda said he wants to rezone parts of the 5th Ward and redevelop the existing housing stock. He said duplexes could be broken down into more single units and that tax abatements should no longer be given to out-of-town developers. He said all voices — renters, developers, landlords and more — should all come together in discussion to

find solutions to these problems so that more Ithaca locals are not pushed out by high prices and taxes.

Walter Hang, resident of Cornell Heights, said he has been continually frustrated by the governance of Ithaca, especially when it comes to environmental and public health issues. He said he doubted that students could truly address community issues in a meaningful way.

“I totally believe that Ithaca is

the worst governed locality I am aware of in all my travels, and I’ve worked in 12 states,” Hang said. “To make matters worse, we now have these students who basically think that they’re running for Congress or the U.N., and they want to deal with these overarching global issues, and they’re not dealing with the fact that ... people can’t afford to live here.”

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# Campus sees lower enagement in local election

BY ISABELLA EDGHILL

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Ahead of the general election in November 2024, Ithaca College students, faculty and staff, along with support from community organizations, formed a Voter Registration Task Force to encourage voter engagement among students. This year, however, is considered an “off-year.” The elections in Ithaca in November will focus primarily on local offices, including the county legislature and the Common Council, and student voter initiatives at IC are largely inactive this semester.

In 2024, the task force held a voter registration drive, which educated students about topics such as how to vote by mail and even helped to facilitate rides to the polls on election day. Cathy Michael, research and instruction librarian at the college and task force chair, said she hopes to ramp up the voter engagement initiatives again before the midterm elections in 2026.

The 2026 midterm elections mark the halfway point of the current presidential term and are when major congressional elections take place, giving voters a chance to have a say in which party controls Congress. All of the House of Representatives will be up for election, as will a third of the seats in the Senate. However, neither of New York’s two senators will be up for reelection in 2026.

Michael Trotti, professor in the Department of History and legal studies coordinator, said local races are still pertinent in the lives of students.

“I think local elections are really important, but neither students nor most institutions focus on them nearly as

much as the larger federal battles that we’re waging right now,” Trotti said.

Without the same level of energy from students concerning the elections in Ithaca this fall, on-campus voter engagement initiatives are not as active. Trotti gave presentations in Ithaca seminar classes in Fall 2024 on voting-related issues, but is not doing the same this semester.

Voter engagement efforts on campus were supported by the Tompkins County League of Women Voters. In 2023, LWV contacted Michael, hoping to table at the college on National Voter Registration Day. This led to the creation of the Voter Registration Task Force at IC. LWV President Megan Nettleton said the league has held many registration drives on college campuses over the years.

“We really believe that everybody of all ages should play an active part in government and vote in all the elections,” Nettleton said. “It’s really important that college kids are involved in that.”

However, without a contact person on campus through the Voter Registration Task Force to help facilitate the partnership, Nettleton said they are not hosting any events at IC this year.

To be eligible to vote in Tompkins County, voters must be U.S. citizens, at least 18 years of age and have lived at their present address for at least 30 days. Voting eligibility requirements can vary by states and counties.

Despite a lack of on-campus initiatives, some students are still preparing to vote in November. Many first-year students can register to vote for the first time.

First-year student Jillian Schaible said she decided to register in their



The general elections in Ithaca will focus on local offices, including the county legislature and the Common Council, and student voter initiatives at IC are largely inactive this semester.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RAESSLER GUTHRIE AND MEI DENNISON/THE ITHACAN

hometown in Pennsylvania. She said it was relatively easy to navigate the process of registering and requesting her mail-in ballot online.

“A lot of the decisions that I feel like are being made in small towns are not being made by the right people,” Schaible said.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission found that mail-in voting made up about 30% of voter turnout in the 2024 election. The Census Bureau reported that 26.3% of voters aged 18 to 24 voted by mail last November. IC students can vote in local elections in their hometowns via vote by mail while living in Ithaca.

First-year student Hailey LaViolett said the process for requesting her mail-in ballot from Texas was complicated, but it was important to her to have her vote

count in her home state.

“I would like to help flip Texas to be a certain political way,” LaViolette said. “Right now, I don’t really agree with how Texas has been treating [its] politics.”

Although the Voter Registration Task Force is inactive during the local elections, Michael said there are still plenty of resources students can use to stay informed about this year’s election and plan their vote.

Michael said she compiled a guide on Political Communication and Voting, which includes resources to help students plan their vote and instructions on how to contact political representatives.

“It’s never too soon to get registered and get involved,” Michael said.

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# Locals upset with Rep. Riley’s support for Israel

BY EAMON CORBO  
ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

Residents of Ithaca have expressed concern and disagreement over Rep. Josh Riley’s (D) support for Israel amid Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in the Israel-Hamas war. Some residents believe Riley has not lived up to his commitment to fighting corruption in United States politics and have expressed frustration over his failure to address the genocide.

Riley represents New York’s 19th Congressional District and won his seat inside the House of Representatives in the 2024 congressional election, which includes Tompkins County.

In a September 2024 interview with *The Ithacan*, Riley said he believes the American-Israeli alliance is important and has argued for a negotiated settlement that would provide a ceasefire, a surge in humanitarian assistance and remove Hamas from leadership in Palestine.

“From a policy perspective, I believe the American-Israeli alliance is critically important and that we as a country need to continue to stand with our allies around the world,” Riley said. “Israel is surrounded by terrorist organizations whose mission is to eliminate the Israeli state and we can’t allow that to happen.”

In August, 11 newly elected House Democrats, including

Riley, went on a trip to Israel sponsored by the American Israel Education Foundation, an American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a bipartisan pro-Israel lobbying group, affiliated organization.

Mary Anne Grady Flores, a member of Ithaca Catholic Worker, said the scale of the atrocities committed in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians has made it difficult for her to focus on local issues in Ithaca.

“If you can’t address a genocide, how can I expect you to work towards upholding our democracy and our U.S. Constitution?” Grady Flores said. “Genocide is the red line for the whole world.”

Riley was scheduled to attend a Policy Breakfast at Ithaca College in August. The event was canceled due to safety concerns and a social media post from Ithaca College Students for a Free Palestine that depicted the participants with bloody imagery and plans to protest the breakfast.

Senior Quincey Fireside, who is the president of ICSFP, said the post depicting Riley and other participants with bloody imagery was intended to show the participants’ complicity in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians.

“There’s blood on [Riley’s] hands,” Fireside said. “He went to Israel. He’s supporting Israel financially. He’s being supported by Israel financially. He’s in a business that deals with murder



In August, constituents of Rep. Josh Riley traveled to his Binghamton office to protest his trip to Israel. Riley’s office was empty when the protesters arrived. The protesters hung up 100 photos of suffering Palestinians.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RAESSLER GUTHRIE AND KAELEIGH BANDA/THE ITHACAN

because of that.”

In August, constituents of Riley traveled to his Binghamton office to protest his trip to Israel.

Community member Sriram Parasurama was part of the Binghamton protest. He said he questions if it is worth protesting Riley because he is not a source of the issue, but a symptom of larger systems like capitalism, settler colonialism and imperialism.

“Taking care of your neighbors is as revolutionary of

an act as it is to protest at a court exporting weapons,” Parasurama said.

Fireside said they think it is worth holding representatives like Riley accountable because they have access to them since they represent a smaller group of people than senators and the president.

“I can’t get an audience with Donald Trump, certainly not one where he’s going to be listening to what I have to say about complex

global policy issues,” Fireside said. “But if I can get an audience with the congressman from the 19th District of New York state and convince him and show him how serious this is and how much his constituents care, he can go back to Washington [D.C.] and share that story.”

Assistant News Editor Julian DeLucia and Senior Writer Ryan Johnson contributed reporting.

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# Prop 1 to retroactively legalize sports complex

BY RYAN JOHNSON  
SENIOR WRITER

New York state will vote Nov. 4 on Proposal One, a proposal for a constitutional amendment to permit ski trails at the Mount Van Hoevenberg Olympic Sports Complex on up to 323 acres of Adirondack Forest Preserve and to accommodate global competitions, training and events in Lake Placid. In exchange, the state will acquire 2,500 acres of land to include in the forest preserve.

The Adirondack Forest Preserve is located in the Adirondack Park, which covers around six million acres of land in northeastern New York. The forest preserve covers about 2.7 million acres of land in Adirondack Park and is state-owned.

The Mount Van Hoevenberg Sports Complex — located in Lake Placid — was created for the Winter Olympics in 1932 and expanded for the 1980 Winter Olympic Games. The facility covers 1,039 acres of forest preserve land, which, according to Section 1 of Article 14 of the New York Constitution, is unconstitutional because forest preserve lands are supposed to be forever kept as forest preserve lands and never built on.

Since the decision will amend the New York Constitution, residents of New York state will vote to approve or reject the proposal on the ballot Nov. 4. State Sen. Peter Harcham (D) and Sen. Daniel Stec (R) introduced the constitutional amendment to the state legislature March 7, 2023.

The bill passed 58-0. The bill was introduced to the New York state

Assembly June 8 and was passed in a vote of 114-1. Mount Van Hoevenberg is not the only sports complex or ski area that has been built on the forest preserve; however, it is the only complex that was not constitutionally supported.

According to the Adirondack Mountain Club, public use ski areas like Belleayre Mountain and Gore Mountain were approved to be built through constitutional amendments.

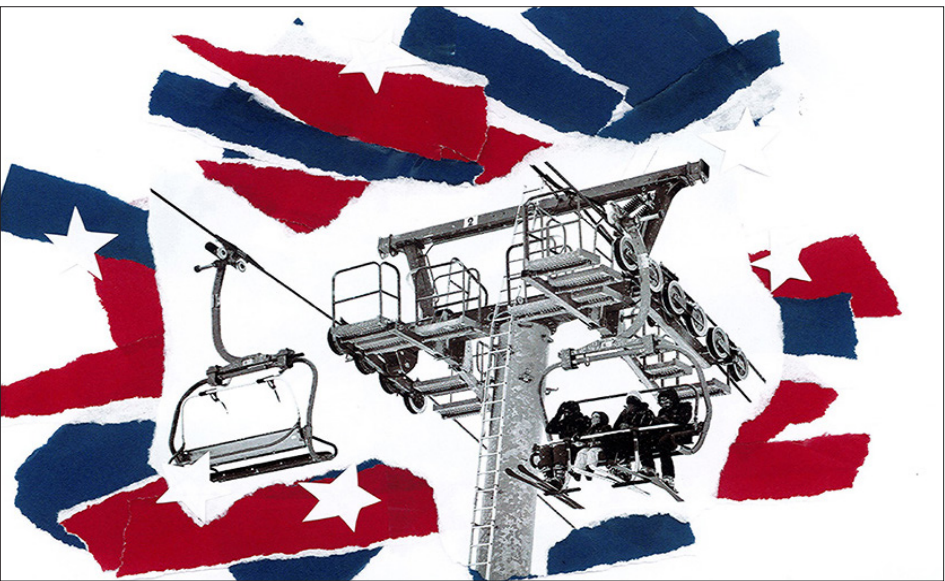
Claudia Braymer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks, said the proposal has taken some time to get on the ballot because of the long legislative process.

“It was really the 2023 games that it became very obvious that [the Olympic Regional Development Authority] was doing too much [on the forest preserve],” Braymer said. “There’s no court ruling that said they violated Article 14, but that’s what we felt they were doing.”

Justin Levine, senior communications specialist at the Adirondack Council, said the 323 acres of the sports complex in the forest preserve are already being used, and the amendment is a retroactive amendment. According to Black’s Law Dictionary, a retroactive amendment is defined as a law that “looks backward or contemplates the past, affecting acts or facts that existed before the act came into effect.”

“Mount Van Hoevenberg expanded onto the forest preserve where they shouldn’t have and this amendment will make that use allowable,” Levine said.

The Mount Van Hoevenberg Olympic Sports Complex is a tourist attraction and a venue for recreation, competitions and athletic training. Ithaca College



New York state will vote on Proposal One, a proposal for a constitutional amendment to permit ski trails at the Mount Van Hoevenberg Olympic Sports Complex on Adirondack Forest Preserve.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RAESSLER GUTHRIE/THE ITHACAN

senior Silas Peters, a registered voter in Tompkins County, said he was unaware of the proposition. Peters said he is worried that the amendment could be used for the future taking of forest preserve land.

“I don’t know for sure that’s what it means, but I want to have more insight if that means they’re [taking forest preserve land] or not,” Peters said.

Peters said he will look into the proposition more before he votes, but he had no plans to vote on the proposition originally because he did not know about it.

Sara Bronin is a professor of law at the George Washington University and served as chair of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation from 2023-24. Bronin said the proposition could correct an error that was

made in the original designation of the Adirondack Park.

“I don’t think that this will create a precedent that others seeking to carve out other parts of Adirondack Park will be able to hang their hat on ... and in a way it does reflect and honor the history of the site, which was used for the Olympics,” Bronin said.

Levine said the most important thing that voters should know is that in order to vote for the proposition, voters will have to physically flip their ballots over.

“People may not realize that there are actually things on the back of the ballot that they [can] vote for,” Levine said. “So I would strongly encourage everyone to flip over their ballot and vote yes.”

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# OPINION

## Informed local voting ensures a quality future

Local elections shape everyday life in Ithaca, from housing policy and environmental protections, to public transit and policing. Ithacans have a civic duty to not only vote, but also to research and actually know the people and positions on the ballot. This keeps elected officials accountable, responsive and representative of the community’s wants and needs.

Even though many of the elections in Ithaca are uncontested, it is important to know candidates’ platforms and views to hold them accountable. Casting an informed vote is necessary to protect everyday interests and democratic representation.

Issues like roads filled with potholes, zoning decisions that affect housing and public safety concerns are all decided by Ithaca’s Common Council and the Tompkins County Legislature, not by any federal officials.

Local elections matter just as much as larger elections.

The Common Council enacts local ordinances, sets budgets and manages city affairs.

The decisions made by the Common Council have immediate, measurable effects. The council’s budget choices affect the public services it provides, and zoning decisions made by the council change housing supply and affordability.

These local officials’ decisions

and policies affect daily life just as much as federal official’s decisions do.

Despite their importance, local elections routinely and continuously have a much lower turnout rate than national races, as evident by the 2025 Tompkins County primary election where only 5.21% of registered voters in the county actually came out to the polls. This lack of voter attendance can amplify the influence of small organized groups, potentially skewing local representation.

Younger voters and voters of color often participate less in local, low-turnout elections which deepens existing inequalities in political representation. These minority groups vote at lower rates, resulting in policies that tend to only reflect the perspectives and needs of the people who do show up: typically older, wealthier and whiter populations.

This dynamic can shape everything from how public funds are allocated, to which neighborhoods receive infrastructure upgrades or environmental protections. When younger groups and minorities engage politically, they don’t merely elect individuals, they help shape a more representative and just government that acknowledges the realities of every part of the community. Voters must choose inclusive and transparent



Ithaca locals must cast informed votes in the upcoming election to ensure the future of the city. It is important for voters to know multiple candidates’ platforms to protect everyday interests and democratic representation.

MEI DENNISON/THE ITHACAN

candidates to ensure an equitable government for all.

However, voting is not as simple as just showing up on Election Day. Casting a ballot is important, but actually knowing who you are voting for is even more crucial.

Voting without knowing the candidates and issues is essentially guessing — it hands the real power to whoever’s campaign happens to best mobilize voter turnout, not the real majority interest. Informed voting ensures that outcomes of elections reflect

residents’ collective values rather than the influence of money, recognition or party loyalty.

Knowing the candidates means more than simply having their sign in the yard or reading a slogan. It means truly understanding not only how they will treat the town, but also what values guide their decision-making.

To know potential candidates, voters should take advantage of local resources that make it easier to learn about who’s on the ballot. Voters should read candidate

statements and platforms to gain insight into their priorities. The Tompkins County Board of Elections also publishes sample ballots before every election, and the Common Council website posts meeting minutes that help reveal how candidates may vote.

Ithaca locals must cast informed votes in the upcoming election to ensure the future of the city. Voting in local elections takes direct action towards bettering the living conditions for all Ithacans.

## Youth engagement in local politics is crucial

Youth voters are crucial to helping shape policy priorities, deciding local races that can often affect campus life through things like student rentals and public transit and building long-term civic power.

Ithaca students need to register to vote and actually show up to local poll because their collective choices directly shape housing, transit, tuition and climate policy in both the city of Ithaca and Tompkins County as a whole.

Young voters should be actively engaging with their politics, not just casting ballots for government officials. Student voters can decide to register either in their hometown elections, or in Ithaca’s local election.

This means student voters must think critically about where their vote has the most direct impact, and where they feel most connected and affected by policy decisions.

Voters between the ages of 18-29 have historically lagged compared to older demographics. In fact, the 2018 midterm elections broke records for the highest youth voter turnout, where only 28% of young, registered voters came to the polls to cast their ballot.

Ithaca’s large population of students from both Ithaca College and Cornell University means that students affect life more than just making up a majority of the youth population in Ithaca; it means that youth can enact real political change.

By attending local government meetings, political rallies and participating in campus discussions, young voters can engage with their politics in meaningful, ongoing ways — much more than just casting a vote.

Students can attend Common Council or Tompkins County Legislature meetings, where debates over housing, public transportation and sustainability can directly affect student life.

These forums also provide ample opportunities to speak during public comment periods, where student voices can highlight how policies impact their lives.

By advertising their perspectives, youth can influence what issues dominate certain candidates’ campaigns. This participation can encourage some candidates to recognize student concerns in their platforms and policies.

Youth participation can push the political agenda toward sustainability, equity and social justice; all of which are major priorities to many Ithaca locals.

In doing so, young voters not only strengthen local democracy, but also help ensure that the policies shaping Ithaca reflect the voices of those who will inherit its future.

The average American voter is over 50, meaning that the older generations continue to have disproportionate influence over policy decisions that can affect young people’s futures.

From climate policy to student debt



Young voters need to be actively engaging in local politics in meaningful ways, rather than merely filling in a ballot. In doing so, these voters help Ithaca’s policies reflect their own voices.

ATTICUS JACKSON/THE ITHACAN

relief, many of the pressing issues being debated today will have the greatest impact on those just starting their adult lives, i.e. young voters.

A true, representative democracy means intergenerational balance, where everyone’s voice is being heard no matter their age; but, for this to happen, young people need to actively show up to the polls.

Not only do youth voters shape the current, everyday life of Ithaca locals,

but they also set a precedent; voting at a young age increases the probability of lifelong civic participation, including in major and minor races. There are true long-term democratic benefits beyond a single local election

Students have numerical power, local stakes and a civic duty to vote. Youth voters can change current policies and start to build the government they will continue to live under for the rest of their lives.

# WHAT DOES ITHACA THINK?

Locals comment on issues they hope can be addressed in the election

“ I see health care and education, civil rights, justice and shall I say, a kind and considerate approach to environmental matters as being very important for me and our community. ”

— BEVERLY ABLANALP, NONPROFIT LEADER



“ I feel like I am not really educated on any issues locally, and I would like to be more educated on them. ”

— JULIA OPLINGER, ITHACA COLLEGE SOPHOMORE



“ There’s always the ever-present infrastructure issues. The roads are really bad around here. [They’re] accentuated by when they finally fix ones. ”

— KRIS HODGES, MARKET RESEARCHER



“ I would be interested to know what some of the solutions toward affordable housing and homelessness issues are in the community, because I feel like, especially in The Commons walking around, a lot of the time, there’s a lot of unhoused people. ”

— LENA DEBANG, ITHACA COLLEGE SOPHOMORE



“ Most of the candidates talk about housing costs, so maybe there’s something we can do about that. Maybe getting more of a payment from Cornell [University] as well. ... I’m not a renter, but people have trouble. Your rent is so high. I don’t think there’s anything to do about it. ”

— PETER SILBERMAN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPOSITION AND MUSIC STUDIES AT ITHACA COLLEGE

