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## Somerset Co. mayors develop new strategies

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**Published in the Courier News on November 6, 2003**

New mayors in Somerville and Franklin, Somerset County, will have divided councils and committees to work with when they take office next year.

While Somerville's Mayor-elect Brian Gallagher, a Republican, and Councilman Robert Wilson, a Democrat who was re-elected Tuesday, say they can put politics aside after the election, Franklin might be a different story.

Somerville's mayor and council face several major decisions about how to develop the former landfill property and the redevelopment of the Landmark Shopping Center and east end of the downtown district.

Both parties agree that redevelopment -- with an emphasis on commercial, tax-generating properties -- is a way to ease municipal taxes.

"I don't think there was a tremendous variance in opinion during the campaign (on redevelopment)," Wilson said. "I don't see problems with the various issues, be it the landfill or Landmark redevelopment."

Gallagher agreed that the council has easily put aside party differences after past elections. Republicans will keep a 4-2 majority on the governing body.

"It's the same approach we've taken from Day One since I got on the council," said Gallagher, the current council president. "We have the ability to put politics aside. We can talk about the issues with our counterparts."

Franklin's Republican Mayor-elect Brian Levine, a former councilman, will face a 7-2 Democratic majority when he takes that office in January.

His opponent, Democrat Bill Grippo, said the GOP claimed he is a "tax and spend" Democrat, which he said prevented his election as mayor, but worked to his advantage. He is head of the township Democratic party, and with election of his three running mates, he'll still have plenty of control.

"I'm probably more powerful more than ever. It might have knocked me off as mayor, but I'm in the position of having three guys. It has worked out better," Grippo said. "I'll continue with plans I initiated."

Franklin's mayor isn't a strong administrator under the township's form of government, which gives the township manager more power. But Levine insists he'll be more than a figurehead.

"I intend to be a leader and introduce and push my initiatives. I'll use my position to get good ordinances and legislation passed," Levine said. "I certainly wish to work with them (the council)."

The mayor-elect said his nonlegislative goals include curtailing development and bringing business to the township's industrial section.

Levine wants to introduce a stronger "pay-to-play" law, which would limit how much professionals, such as lawyers, engineers and accountants, doing business with the township can donate to local candidates and to the county political party.

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