



Jason Gooljar started a local government and politics blog called Greenburgh on the Rise. Gooljar, photographed Sunday in Hartsdale, plans to seek a seat in the state Assembly next year.

Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Journal News**.
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Town drops link to controversial Web site

By **JOSEPH AX**
THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original Publication: April 5, 2005)

GREENBURGH — Jason Gooljar, a 26-year-old town resident, came across a link to the Web site for the citizens group Grassroots for Greenburgh on the town's official Web site a couple of weeks ago.

After reading messages from residents criticizing Supervisor Paul Feiner, he decided to set up his own online journal — of the type known as a Weblog — offering pro-Feiner posts from himself and others and taking Feiner critics to task. He asked Feiner if the town would link to his site, called Greenburgh on the Rise, as it had for Grassroots for Greenburgh, and the supervisor granted his request.

Less than a week after the site became active, however, the Weblog — or "blog" — has generated controversy among officials and those whose names appear in the blog's occasionally vitriolic entries. Both links have been removed while the Town Board discusses whether to institute an official policy.

And Gooljar said the attacks on his blog, which he claims are an assault on free speech, have persuaded him to abandon his candidacy for Greenburgh Town Board in the fall, though he will still seek the state's 92nd Assembly District seat next year.

Gooljar's run for a Town Board seat had prompted some to ask whether the town's site should link to his site at all.

The ethical concerns raised by his blog in some ways mirror those that have accompanied blogs ever since their role in last year's presidential race brought the blogosphere into the country's mainstream consciousness.

When a government site links to a blog, for example, is it responsible for its content? Is it proper for official sites to link to blogs that are explicitly partisan or that are hosted by candidates for office? It is difficult to know, experts say.

"It's just a big hazy area," said Joe Graf of the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet at George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. "Linking to sites clearly ties your site to this other site in the viewer's mind, and because of that, the political parties have

On the Web

Jason Gooljar's blog:

<http://greenburghontherise.blogspot.com>

Grassroots for Greenburgh's site:

<http://home.att.net/~grassrootsforgreenburgh/>

Prominent national political blogs

www.dailykos.com

www.instapundit.com

<http://oxblog.blogspot.com>

been very careful who they link to."

Gooljar's status as a candidate makes the link to his site even more problematic, even though he does not discuss his candidacy on the blog. Francis Sheehan, a Greenburgh resident and co-founder of Grassroots for Greenburgh, is also a candidate for Town Board.

Gooljar, a Democrat, said his blog was simply meant to be a counterpoint to some of the posts on the Grassroots for Greenburgh site.

"The intent was always to show my side and disagree with their side," he said.

Candidates and officials across the country have begun to set up blogs more frequently. If they use public money or Web space for the blogs, they are restricted from campaign activities, such as soliciting money. And they have typically been cautious in linking to other sites, often including disclaimers to dissociate themselves from the sites' content.

Feiner said he makes no distinction based on the site's political leanings, pointing out the frequent criticisms leveled at him by residents posting on the Grassroots for Greenburgh site. But he said he had removed the links so that the Town Board can discuss the concerns that have been expressed and formulate a policy to deal with requests for links.

"I believe in free speech, and I believe anybody who wants the opportunity to express themselves should express themselves," he said. "The policy has to be consistent."

But Graf also said that blogs often encourage the type of disparaging language one likely would not find in a newspaper.

In the town of Southeast, for example, Town Clerk Ruth Mazzei is considering legal action against Democratic Town Chairwoman Lynne Eckardt for an Internet posting she wrote claiming Mazzei fabricated information and included it in board minutes.

In Greenburgh, Bob Bernstein, the Edgemont lawyer who recently beat the town in a lawsuit arguing that village residents must help pay for a parkland acquisition, sent a letter to Gooljar accusing him of libel and asking him to delete the offending posts.

Police Chief John Kapica also contacted Gooljar, saying there had been concerns from residents that recent acts of vandalism perpetrated against two people criticized in the blog were a result of the blog's content.

Those two residents were Sheehan and Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, a member of the town's Democratic Committee and the president of Westchester Coalition for Legal Abortion.

As a result of Bernstein's letter, Gooljar temporarily removed the blog for two days last week while consulting a lawyer. It became active again Thursday but had been edited to remove passages some found offensive. Gooljar said the lawyer had indicated the content of his blog did not violate any law.
