



Steven Schwartz and Jeffrey Fisher have launched the East Hampton Group for Good Government, a new watchdog group.

STEPHEN J. KOTZ

Watchdog group launches site

Group for Good Government also plans to hold forums

By Beth Young

In the midst of East Hampton Town's fiscal crisis, a group of residents who have been quietly meeting since last November launched a new website and began a push for publicity for a watchdog group that they hope will ensure that the town never faces a similar crisis in the future.

Jeff Fisher, the retired president of Fisher Industries, a steel distributor, and Steven Schwartz, an attorney and real estate developer, are among the founders of the East Hampton Group for Good Government. They hope the organization will spur competent candidates from both political parties to run for town office and encourage an increase in voter registration, particularly among second-home owners, who are allowed by New York State law to select their second home as their voting address.

They also plan to hold public forums to make voters aware of the issues underlying sound town government.

The group does not plan to endorse candidates during this

election cycle, but will hold a straw poll among its members—all town residents are invited to become members and donations are voluntary—on its website, www.ehggg.org, before this fall's election.

Ultimately, the group's organizers plan to create a Political Action Committee after this election cycle to ensure that the group has enough ammunition to wage an aggressive campaign if either of the town's political parties puts forth incompetent candidates in the future.

"If we'd had both parties running equally capable people in the past, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now," said Mr. Schwartz.

"We couldn't understand how the nominating committees could put up the slate of people we have now" on the Town Board, said Mr. Fisher. "Would we hire the people in town government now to manage our money? The answer is no. We need people competent enough to run a \$70 million business." Mr. Fisher said that his group is not

a response to the East Hampton Conservators, a Political Action Committee devoted to environ-

mental issues that tends to back Democratic candidates. "They're heavy-duty Democrats," he said of the Conservators. "They're the people who are at Alan Patricof's house when the Clintons come. We're not at all like that. They're very solid citizens, but I just believe in not blindly agreeing with a candidate just because he belongs to a particular party."

Mr. Schwartz said that he hopes some members of the Conservators join the Group for Good Government as well.

"It's a tent that allows everybody to be in it," he said, adding that the group's membership is in the hundreds now and he hopes very soon that it will be in the thousands. "Everybody's in favor of land preservation or else they wouldn't be living here. That's a non-issue."

"The issue for us is solid government," said Mr. Fisher. "And civility," said Mr. Schwartz. "That's a message that resonates with our people. Maybe it's a James Stewart attitude from the old movies, but that's what I grew up with."

Mr. Fisher is hosting a sold-out

meet-the-candidates lawn party this weekend, and candidates from both parties will be attending.

"We're a winner either way," said Mr. Fisher of the Town Supervisor race. Deputy Suffolk County Executive Ben Zwirn is the Democrats' pick, while Bill Wilkinson, a former senior vice president of Human Resources at the Walt Disney Company, who was the GOP candidate for supervisor in 2007, is running again. "It seems both people are a wonderful step in the right direction," said Mr. Schwartz.

The group has also been meeting with regional politicians for guidance on how to attract qualified candidates in town government. Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman recently addressed the group on the laundry list of qualities that make a good public official, and Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy is expected to address the group in August.

"It's not going to end in November," said Mr. Schwartz. "This is not just devoted to getting rid of McGintee."