



EDHCSD candidates boast qualifications

By Mike Roberts | Village Life staff writer | October 12, 2010 12:05

Three members of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District board are up for reelection next month, and another three candidates are eager for their seats. All six appeared Oct. 11 at a candidate forum hosted by the Bass Lake Action Committee and the Four Seasons Civic League, moderated by El Dorado Hills activist Rachel Michelin.

Roughly 30 members of the community were present to hear the candidates put their best foot forward.

The race figures to be competitive, with two-term board member Justin Masters, who survived the asbestos issue and the Promontory Park battles, joined by popular incumbents Tony Rogozinski and Bill Vandegrift. All three have deep roots in the community.

The district's recently retired general manager Wayne Lowery is a hybrid candidate, running for a spot on the board where he served as the district's front-man for the last 20 years.

Given the competition, the other two candidates might be considered long shots if it weren't for their strong résumés. Chuck Hammond is the former mayor of Fairfield, and currently coaches four different youth basketball teams at the CSD.

Retired San Jose Police Capt. David Keneller brings a strong government administration résumé, recent county Grand Jury service, and some concrete and sensible ideas about problems that have vexed the district since its inception.

Masters introduced himself Monday night as the "old timer" of the group, with eight years of board service under his belt. He called the accomplishments of the last four years "building blocks," citing the recent staff reduction and reorganization as an example of a district positioning itself to survive on lower revenues.

Lowery touted his "unique position," having managed district growth from 7,500 residents when he signed on in 1990 to a current population of 36,000. During that time he oversaw the construction of 11 parks and 33,000 square feet of facilities, including a state-of-the-art community swimming pool, he said.

Lowery also boasted the district's tight fiscal controls, including a clean record of "unqualified" audits and a recent award for a comprehensive fiscal analysis. "We've been extremely conservative," he said. "We've got a flexible master plan in place and are prepared to respond if an opportunity opens up to do something with the former golf course."

Hammond said he's running for the CSD board because, "I like what's happening in El Dorado Hills

and I want to be a part of it.” He called El Dorado Hills a “growing town where I’ve been able to work with children, to mold them and help them grow.”

“This town reminds me of Fairfield in that a lot of people work outside the community,” Hammond said. “They get home late and aren’t going to sit in a board meeting.”

He suggested televising the meetings. “We need to do a little romancing to get people involved here,” he said.

Incumbent Bill Vandegrift said he ran for the board four years ago because he was frustrated that the prior board loaned \$66,000 to the incorporation effort while four directors were running for city council. “Incorporation would have been a major financial calamity,” he said. “It will happen eventually, but not right now.”

He said he came onto the board as a single man with no children, a love of the community and no particular agenda. “I just wanted to get things done that people have been waiting for. The Marina district residents have waited 23 years for Lake Forest Park.”

Vandegrift predicted that property tax revenues would likely remain low for the next couple years, and said he wants the next general manager to be profit-oriented. “We need programs that make money, not dole it out,” he said, and suggested passing the hat at the summer concerts.

Retired San Jose Police Capt. David Keneller moved to El Dorado Hills three years ago. He’s a two-term grand juror and treasurer of his homeowners association. “I can order from the senior menu at Denny’s and I also have a 10-year old son that I coach in Little League,” he said, adding, “I also have an 86-year-old mother in law living with us, so I’m keen on senior issues.”

His police responsibilities, “budgeting, layoff contingencies, collaborations with parks and recreation department on juvenile crime prevention and gang intervention,” were all good preparation for board service, he said. Along the way Keneller managed up to 200 detectives and spearheaded a \$170 million public safety bond, he said. “I may be new to politics, but I’ve got plenty of government experience.”

Keneller promised better succession planning and leadership training, so the district doesn’t find itself with absent upper management. “Accountability and discipline slip,” he said.

He suggested the next board use task forces or advisory committees to get the community more involved in the important district issues. “Your meetings are sparsely attended, and that probably means the public is satisfied, but you need public input, especially now that you have less staff.”

Keneller noted that vandalism has increased in the parks, and suggested getting the Sheriff’s Department to do some focused enforcement, and possibly opening up office space for deputies to use at night.

Veteran youth sports advocate Tony Rogozinski thanked his family for granting him the time to serve on the CSD board for the last four years. “This takes a lot of time,” he said. “You have to give your heart and soul to the community, and I’ll continue to bring it if you choose to reelect me.”

He ran for the board “to make this community better for our youth, our future,” he said. “And I still believe that.”

Rogozinski said he took special pride in his board's integrity, citing the Bass Lake CC&R refund, which returned roughly \$1,200 to Woodridge residents. "We could have kept that money because of the statute of limitations, but this board voted 5-0 for a full refund."

Rogozinski, an outspoken fiscal conservative on the board, said he's learned not to be afraid to tell people "We can't do it" or "We need your help to do it."

Union endorsements

The morale of the recently downsized and "re-orged" CSD staff, which is unionized with a PERS benefit package, was a recurring theme throughout the night. Michelin asked each candidate to divulge any contributions or endorsements they'd received from the union.

Both Hammond and Lowery were endorsed by the union, but only Hammond received a contribution.

He said he won their endorsement by calling them and listening. "If you don't listen to them you don't know what their problems are."

"They told me that if they were comfortable they wouldn't need a union," Hammond said, adding that most felt they had no relationship with the board, and wouldn't even say they liked their jobs.

Lowery takes particular pride in his union endorsement. "I spent 18 years on the opposite side of the table, including layoffs and re-orgs," he said. "Their backing means a lot to me, but I made it clear - that they couldn't expect any concessions."

Keneller said management and staff needed to communicate better, and suggested "vertical staff meetings" and an employee suggestion reward program, both of which he said he's implemented successfully in the past.

"If you treat people with respect and good leadership, they will follow you," he said. "As a 30-year union member I can help make that happen."

Masters recalled inviting the staff into the budget discussions. "They know we have a policy that prohibits deficit spending," he said. "Yet they tried to get us to draw down our reserve fund. We opted to reorganize and streamline instead."

Vandegrift argued that there is plenty of communication between the board and the union. He said he sees them frequently in the community and knows many on a first name basis. "We even brought in a human resources person at their behest to make sure their issues are dealt with," he said.

"They may not agree with some of what we've done about salary and benefits, but I get concerned when 61 percent of our budget is going to salaries and benefits," Vandegrift said. "That's got to change."

In closing

Michelin closed by quoting the CSD's core beliefs and values, which call for "uncompromising integrity." She asked each candidate if they'd been convicted of a crime or accused of unethical conduct during the last 10 years.

Five of the six replied “no.” Hammond, however, said “yes I have,” a reference to alleged loan violations of the political reform act in early and mid-’90s while he served on the Fairfield City Council, for which he was eventually fined \$4,000 each, according to the Fairfield Daily Republic.

He said he’s been endorsed by county Supervisors John Knight and Ray Nutting, as well as more than 1,000 El Dorado Hills parents. “No one loves being a public servant or working with kids more than me,” said Hammond. “After practice last week we went out and walked precincts. It was a wonderful experience.”

Vandegrift concluded by saying he has also been endorsed by Supervisors Knight and Nutting, as well as District Attorney Vern Pierson and Auditor-Controller Joe Harn.

“I’m not about the process; I’m about getting the results,” he said. “That’s the way I roll.”

Keneller said he invested 30 years learning how to be a good civil servant. “Public service is in my blood, he said. “I’ll bring an independent voice with fresh ideas.”

Masters said he serves on the board because he cares. “I fought four years for the pool in my neighborhood because I care about this place,” he said. “I have five kids in this community. I offer you my heart, my integrity and my hard work.”

Lowery said the management vacancies make his background particularly relevant. “Nobody has my breadth of background in how this district operates or my knowledge of the intricacies of this district.”

Rogozinski concluded by saying his strength is in setting expectations and being straight with people. “I take this personal,” he said. “This is who I am. I think you can see what we’ve done over the last four years. If that’s not good enough, its OK, vote for one of these other guys. I gave it my best shot. But I’d like to continue to serve. I have a lot to offer.”

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