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Candidates: Forks election crucial

Future zoning decisions could rest on shoulders of two new supervisors in township.

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By JD MALONE
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FORKS TWP. | Two new supervisors will join the board after the general election at a time that all of the candidates agree is critical for the township.

The field for November's general election features four men seeking their first public office: James Wideman, Robert Egolf, David Billings and Erik Chuss.

Incumbent John Ackerman lost in the primary and Chairman David Hoff declined to seek re-election.

The candidates think the two seats – each with a six-year term – could decide the future of the township considering the pace of development and the looming zoning battle with KMRD LP.

Wideman, 52, said farmland preservation is important to him. He opposes compromising with KMRD over its proposed 3,000-home Kings Mill development.

"I feel that if the developers were to succeed (in avoiding current zoning code), it would devastate the township," the Democrat said. "Infrastructure would be highly impacted."

Wideman, who works as a stair contractor, said he would uphold zoning ordinances and wants the township to call timeout on development and catch its breath.

"I think it is time to take a step back and assess where we're at and move forward in an intelligent way," Wideman said.

Wideman served on the planning commission for two years. He said he believes he can help deliver efficient government, viable schools and a robust economy.

Egolf, 68, said he also thinks growth and how to control it is the top issue in this campaign.

"I hope to control growth," said Egolf, the assistant chairman of the zoning hearing board. "We can't stop it. We can try to control it."

The Democratic candidate said the township is in a "wait-and-see" period with respect to the Kings Mill project.

"We must uphold our zoning code and we must take it very seriously," Egolf said. "It is something that protects every aspect of the community."

Egolf said he also wants to attract more business to the township, especially light industry.

"We have a great industrial park, and we have an empty, old mall that could accommodate fine businesses," he said.

Billings, 49, said he wants to protect the township's quality of life, tighten spending and hold the line on the township's zoning laws.

"I want to preserve the farmland where possible and defend our zoning ordinances," the Republican said. "I also believe we have a moral obligation to spend tax dollars wisely."

Billings is against suspending hearings on the King Mill development -- a possible topic at Monday's zoning hearing board meeting -- or bending codes to avoid litigation.

"I think it is a gamble to compromise before Forks' board changes," Billings said. "I have three kids in the (Easton Area School District), and I know firsthand exactly what the effects are going to be. And it's not good."

Billings is a product director for AT& T.

Chuss, 46, has about seven years of experience on the planning commission and thinks development continues to be the top issue for any supervisor.

"Not only new development," the Republican said, "but also dealing with the extensive development that is now taking place ... the pressure on services, roads, taxes."

Chuss, a vice president at SMS/800, said he thinks his background and service on the planning commission make him the best candidate.

He also said the current zoning laws are important for the township's future, and he wants to defend them.

"I'm very strongly opposed to any sort of compromise with KMRD," Chuss said. "Because there is a lot of time and effort put into the zoning ordinances ... and to ignore those ordinances without legitimate reason is unacceptable."

Reporter JD Malone can be reached at 610-759-4599 or by e-mail at jdmalone@express-times.com.

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