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Rome race looks familiar

By Andrew Hellpap

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This year's Rome town chairman race will be a rematch of sorts of the 2003 spring election.

Phil Mclaughlin, 53, will be challenging three-term incumbent Steve Nowicki, 53, again after running as a write-in candidate in 2003.

Mclaughlin, the Adams County zoning administrator, also ran as a registered candidate for a town supervisor position that year.

Since then, Nowicki has seen Rome through a period of growth that included the Alpine Village business park, two long-term planning studies and work to diversify the town's tax base.

Both candidates point to managing the town's growth as the biggest issue no matter who comes out ahead in the April 3 general election.

"Whoever wins the town has to be maintaining a strong financial position," Nowicki said.

Town planning also includes working with Plum Creek to maintain forest land in Rome and the Highway 13 reconstruction project, Nowicki said.

Planning development is critical, Mclaughlin said, but he feels the town needs to stick to its zoning ordinances and planning studies to control the pace of growth in and out of the Alpine Village park.

Town government needs to improve on informing the public about how it operates financially, Mclaughlin said, particularly about its debt.

There is one issue both candidates will have to deal with whether they like it or not: Camping.

The argument about how the town should regulate camping on privately owned land has prompted at least one massive public information request from a citizen and is a hot topic among residents. It caused the town's clerk to comment on its political ramifications on the town's board and chairman races in a heavily attended public meeting in early March.

"Unfortunately, it is going to be a major issue," Nowicki said.

This issue has kept him and the town board from focusing on other things, Nowicki said.

Camping will certainly be an issue in this election and continue for whoever wins, Mclaughlin said.

"This is still going to be hanging there," he said.