

Posted February 15, 2008

Candidates share expertise, views at Rome voters forum

ROME -- Seventy Rome taxpayers listened to a public forum sponsored by the Romemakers and League of Women Voters Monday, February 11th 2008.

Questions raised included:

- Why is running for Rome governmental roles important to the candidates?
- Is the rate of residential, recreational growth too fast?
- Is the rate of growth in the Alpine Village Business Park too slow?
- How are we taking steps to control/improve lake quality?
- How can we control spending at the local government level?
- How is our local government acting accountable as policy makers via channels through Town of Rome Departments and ultimately to the public?
- How will the camping issue be resolved?
- What type of planning, vision do we share concerning the future of the Town of Rome?

Sandra Zenor, municipal judge opened with goals to improve court proceedings in Rome, to streamline the process by reviewing cases prior to the hearings, spend more time on juvenile cases to direct our kids more positively and follow up with the collection of fines by strict enforcement of the right to issue warrants for those in forfeiture. After Zenor's introduction, the League presented the forum questions where each candidate had the opportunity to explore issues important to Rome.

Diane Bannerman introduced herself as a Wood County Highway Department staff accountant with 21 years work experience. Budget management as her background should help Bannerman should she be elected to a Town Supervisor role. Bannerman emphasized that she researches questions and is available for questions. She observed that department heads in the Town of Rome present board reports monthly but would like to take steps to improve the communicative process between the board, staff and public.

Al Bilbao is a 12 year resident, originally from Wisconsin Rapids with a criminal justice background, has worked for the Rome transfer site and snow plows part time. He also has served as a plan commissioner the last year. Bilbao centered on questioning the Town's budget and accountability to the public.

Tom Deckow served as the chairman of the Building Committee to evaluate the conditions of the current town complex and serves on the Rome water utility board. He sees Rome as an established recreational area that has increased growth to a more permanent population in recent years. The increased growth has resulted in a disproportionate burden of taxes being placed on retired people, his view.

Robert Neuenfeldt, also a former board supervisor is running for a Town of Rome Supervisor position. He was unable to participate in the forum, but indicated that his interest in the position was based in his long term residency in the Town and work as a former Town and County supervisor.

Incumbent Don Fornasiere a retired mechanical engineer and manager, has served for several years on the Town Board and in his years served a large proportion of his time serving

government committees and participates in related activities. He also has been trained in seminars such as by the Wisconsin Towns Association to keep up with the latest changes at the State level that effect how Town government can operate. He has witnessed a lot of the growth in the Town in the past years and expressed the view that "While Rome cannot stop growth, controlled growth via strong and enforceable zoning codes protects a community. The business park was a result of planning the future where the businesses would be concentrated in one area, away from residential, recreational areas and to protect the rural character of Rome."

Candidates for three positions were also present from Rome to compete for two positions on the County Board. Cindy Loken is running unopposed and serves as the current county board chair. As an incumbent, Loken expressed the view that the main responsibility of the county is to develop and oversee a budget. At times it is necessary to evaluate which programs should continue running and not, but work within State guidelines that mandate certain assistance programs that have to be carried out at the county level.

Terry James, having served on police and fire commission in Rome, and as an active participant in proposing policy changes at different levels of government, would like to improve the relationship between the Town of Rome and County. "That, he said can only be achieved through more communication."

Karl Klingworth, also having a lot of experience in promoting specific policy changes, talked about how the County could work more in conjunction with the Town of Rome to combat specific issues. The gypsy moth infestation problem was raised by placing more of the accountability with the DNR and following up on the issue at the County level.

Dave Repinski, current board supervisor for Rome is also hoping to maintain his seat on the County Board. He also spoke about the importance of involving the Land/Water Conservation Department at the County level to help solve the gypsy moth problem. He also talked about exploring the idea of outsourcing some government services to raise the possibility of more efficient government practices.

Voting day is Tuesday, February 19th 2008, beginning at 7:00 AM at the Town Hall.

If you weren't at the forum, make contact with your local officials, staff at the Town and County level and the new candidates running. Our job as citizens is to be informed prior to voting day, so that our vision of the Town is explored, problems solved and communication improved.