

## **Handling growth, parks tax top issues in Bonney Lake elections**

### **Published in The News Tribune Fall 2014**

Two issues are framing elections in Bonney Lake this year — one that looks into the future, the other anchored in the recent past. The task of managing ongoing commercial and residential growth in the city of more than 17,000 people will fall to whomever is elected mayor and to two City Council seats Nov. 5.

Meanwhile, a controversial metropolitan parks district tax vote in April has shaken some people's confidence that the council is doing what's best for the community.

The council proposed a separate taxing district for parks and recreation; it was defeated with 80 percent of the vote and led to critics filing complaints with the state about how the measure was promoted.

### **DEVELOPMENT FOCUS OF MAYORAL RACE**

Mayor Neil Johnson is running on the strength of his record since 2006. Johnson said, given a third four-year term, he would focus on following through on plans he and the council have put in place the past several years. He was a City Council member from 2002 to 2005.

"It's a matter of continuing to enhance the downtown areas and Eastown areas," he said, "as well as have a strong economic development component in the city so we can provide more livable-wage jobs."

Johnson, who also works as a sales manager at Rotary Offset Press, attributes the city's economic health during the recession to the efficiency of the council. He said Bonney Lake leaders have not raised taxes, and the city has maintained staff.

As for the controversial parks district vote, Johnson is prepared to wait until voters are more secure and the economy is stronger before asking for another potential tax hike.

"The goal is parks funding, and however the community wants to do it, that's fine with me," he said.

Johnson, who battled leukemia during his previous term, said he's in remission.

Johnson's opponent, retired accountant James Rackley, was a councilman for 14 years before deciding to run against Johnson because of the parks district ballot measure. Though he's not against increased parks funding, he disagrees with the way last spring's vote was handled.

Rackley joined the majority in placing the measure on the ballot, but he now says his vote was based on misinformation. The council held public hearings attended only by the mayor and three council members; there were no recordings or minutes. Rackley said those who attended

reported to the council that citizens were fully behind the parks district, and that he based his vote on their claims.

When voters overwhelmingly rejected the district measure, Rackley said he lost faith in the mayor.

"I no longer feel that I can trust him," Rackley said. "They just didn't do the proper footwork." If elected, Rackley plans to prioritize better communication. He would like to engage more people in city business with social media outreach.

"We need to connect easier and more often with our citizens," he said.

Rackley plans to focus on the developments outlined in the city's comprehensive plan, with an emphasis on Eastown and downtown. He also hopes to move forward on annexing the urban growth area so that residential developments, such as those planned for Plateau 465, can be built to city standards.

### ENGINEERS VIE FOR COUNCIL POSITION 3

Incumbent Dan Swatman, a systems engineer, has served alongside Johnson for several years and hopes to continue the work they started in regards to the city's development.

"Growth is always the largest issue we have to deal with," he said. The council must focus on long-term local and regional infrastructure issues, Swatman said.

If re-elected, he said he plans to continue trying to attract businesses to the city, tailoring incentives to bring in retail establishments and jobs that will fit the area's needs.

He also sees parks as a priority and wants to develop recreational land, such as Victor Falls, which the city recently acquired. He voted with the majority to put the April parks district measure on the ballot and says it was worth it to let the voters weigh in.

James "Kelly" McClimans Sr. is running against Swatman in hopes of changing the City Council culture.

"The value I bring is that I haven't been polluted by city politics," McClimans said.

In his view, the council has not focused enough on managing growth in a responsible way. He voiced concern about the transportation infrastructure and the traffic problems that will come with thousands of people moving to the plateau, including the massive planned community called Tehaleh.

If elected, McClimans said he would make the transportation portion of the city's comprehensive plan a priority.

As a software engineer, McClimans said his background equips him to analyze data and arrive at effective solutions.

## POSITION 6 CANDIDATES SPLIT ON TAX VOTE

Donn Lewis, a council incumbent and a substitute teacher, said he plans to focus on public transportation if elected to a second term.

“Since East Pierce County was removed from the Pierce Transit system, none of this area gets serviced,” he said. “I’d say it’s the No. 1 issue.”

He also would like to see a recreation center or YMCA built for the city’s youth. The YMCA is building in Sumner, and Y officials have said they eventually would like to expand to Bonney Lake.

Lewis strongly favored placing the parks tax district on the ballot, despite the price tag.

“I felt it was worth the \$28,000 to let the people decide,” he said.

Lewis’ challenger is Shawnta Mulligan, a mother of two and a former software engineer. She decided to run after the parks district tax vote. Mulligan was part of the group Families for a Responsible Bonney Lake, which headed up a complaint against the city after the measure was placed on the ballot.

“It’s a sacred trust to spend money you didn’t earn yourself, and that trust was violated,” she said. “I saw consistent patterns of the city’s plans taking precedence over the people’s.”

Mulligan is running on a platform of careful planning, transparency and financial responsibility – things she believes the council ignored in many city planning decisions. She believes the city made a mistake by buying land and later selling it to an apartment developer for a loss of about \$1 million.

She is the daughter of McClimans, raising the possibility of a father-daughter combination on the council.