

An Opinion: Candidate Endorsements

By Scott Laird

Vernonians have a full slate of local candidates on their election ballots that should be arriving in the mail any day now, with three candidates running for Mayor and four candidates running for two City Council seats.

Right now Vernonia's City government is running smoothly, and for the first time we have stability at the City Administrator position after years of having a revolving door. City Administrator Josette Mitchell has built a strong and capable staff around her. The City is putting the final touches on the decades-in-the-making Sewer Upgrade Project. Plans and funding for the Senior Center/Food Bank project have been secured and that project will hopefully break ground next spring. The current Council has developed a good working relationship and understands with each other.

I appreciate the people who step forward and volunteer to run for elected office in our small community, at least those who run for the right reasons. It's generally a thankless job that often forces you to find compromise and make difficult decisions that are going to leave you unpopular with half the citizens. It's a big responsibility to carry the weight of the community on your shoulders and the decisions that are made in those Council chambers can have lasting consequences. Setting policy that will benefit the community as a whole can be tricky business. It's a time consuming job that requires reading and research, long discussions with fellow Councilors so that everyone has a chance to have their opinion heard, and attendance at meeting after meeting.

The wheels of government turn slowly and it takes patience and a willingness to roll up your sleeves, and do your due diligence when working on city projects. Members of the Council need to be flexible, sensible, and reasonable. It can be frustrating, time consuming, and in the end, you don't always get your way.

The flip side is that serving on the City Council does have its rewards. It's about being part of something bigger than yourself. Knowing that you've helped your community solve a tough issue, find an answer for a citizen in need, or see a project through to completion, is a special feeling, and for some people it can be a worthy endeavor.

I believe that first off, potential

candidates should take this responsibility seriously, as should we, the voters being asked to choose between these candidates. I also believe candidates need a strong understanding of how our City operates on a day-to-day basis, a clear picture of the current projects - either underway or under consideration, and have a good understanding of the goals and expectations of the Council and the community at large. They need to have shown the ability to work in a group setting, and be able to put aside any personal agendas or petty grievances. And they need to be able to listen - to their constituents, to the staff at City Hall, and to their other Council members.

Vernonia's Voice Endorsement for Mayor: Jill Hult

Jill is a current City Councilor who appears ready to take this next big leadership step. Her background and experience, both in and outside of Vernonia city government is solid. To me she is clearly the best candidates for this position. Jill has chaired the City Budget Committee. She has work experience in economic development, social services, and flood recovery - all valuable experiences when it comes to working in city government - and she has developed good connections at the County level. She's a longtime Vernonia resident who understands the need for limited growth, but also the need to preserve the small town culture that is so important here. As a City Councilor we've seen her grow into, and learn the nuances of, the position. She clearly understands the current state of the City, and has a good working knowledge of priorities and issues. She understands and respects the value and importance of both City staff and the Citizen Advisory Committees in helping the Council guide the City. She has put in the time and worked her way up the leadership ladder, and is ready for this next responsibility.

Rick Hobart is a longtime Vernonia resident, a volunteer with the Lions Club, and a heck of a nice guy. Rick's work with the Lions, heading up the Dewey Pool renovation, was a huge asset to the community and the City. He has currently been volunteering to beautify the community with the newly formed Green Team. These are all admirable qualities and endeavors. Rick is running for the right reasons, to give back to a community he obviously loves. What Rick lacks is any real previous in-

volvement at the City level. Rick would be a great candidate for a position on a Citizen Advisory Committee where he could better learn the inner workings of City projects and how City Hall operates and functions.

I don't have a lot to say about David Sterner, the third candidate for Mayor. David is running his campaign on one issue, a complaint he filed with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, which has already been settled. He's had almost no past community involvement. David declined to participate in either the candidate questionnaire *Vernonia's Voice* sent out or the Meet the Candidates forum. Just a quick read of his statement in the voters' pamphlet tells you all you need to know - he has no real ideas about what he would do as Mayor of Vernonia, at least none he's been willing to share with voters.

Vernonia's Voice Endorsement for City Council: Dale Webb and Mike Seager

Dale Webb is probably one of the more experienced and qualified Council candidates in Vernonia in a long time. A longtime Vernonia resident who was born and raised here, Dale understands the people in this community. He's spent the last eight years serving on the Public Works Committee, and was instrumental in the City's revamping of water and sewer rates, a project that has taken years of determined work to accomplish - and Dale was right in the thick of it. He also served on the Budget Committee last year, so he has some understanding of City finances. Dale brings a vast amount of experience on other boards and committees. He has expressed a pragmatic and restrained view of City operations. He sees the role of Councilor as a steward of the taxpayers' money. He is an excellent candidate and the community would be lucky to have him sitting on the Council.

Mike Seager is a current City Councilor who has served as the Airport Manager for the City for several decades. As Councilor he has served as liaison to the Parks Committee so he has a working knowledge of that department and the issues there. He's familiar with the City Budget, with Public Works projects, and has a good working relationship with his fellow Councilors. He leads quietly, but hasn't been afraid to take a strong stand when he needs to. I would like to see Mike share more of



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his knowledge when campaigning and it's hard to get a clear read on why he is running or what his ideas are. The current Council has accomplished a lot, so I'm inclined to keep the makeup of the Council as much the same as possible.

J.R. Allen says his construction background and experience would be an asset to the Council and I don't disagree. Unfortunately he doesn't have other real leadership experience to point to that qualifies him for a seat on the City Council. He's been a vocal presence on social media, advocating for volunteerism within the community, and has put his money where his mouth is, helping lead

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