

EWEB CANDIDATES

Differences appear subtle between Mital, Shaver

By Ted Taylor

The Friendly Area Neighbors association held a forum for EWEB candidates recently and only about 15 people showed up and most of them were family and friends of the two candidates, Steve Mital and Will Shaver. *EW* interviewed the two candidates a few days after the forum.

Only Shaver has lawn signs, catching Mital by surprise when he saw a Shaver for EWEB sign on a lawn near his home.

"I totally didn't realize that was just two doors down from him," says Shaver with a laugh. "Totally random chance." The two men, both with strong backgrounds in sustainability management, have been in a friendly competition so far to fill the open seat representing Wards 1 & 8. Incumbent Joann Ernst is not seeking re-election.

Mital is sustainability director at UO, founder of the Environmental Leadership Program at UO and has master's degrees from UO in both community planning and environmental studies. He has volunteered on the board of the Northwest Earth Institute, Oregon University System Sustainability Committee and the Mayor's Bold Steps Committee. Shaver has a bachelor's degree in software engineering from OIT and is senior technical manager at Emberex Custom Software. He has volunteered on the Eugene Sustainability Commission, Churchill Area Neighbors, City Club of Eugene and West Eugene Corridor Committee.

The candidates have somewhat different views on selling city water to Veneta. Shaver says it is "unfortunate" that "a percentage of the population that works in Eugene can't afford to live in Eugene, so they move to these other communities." He cites two reasons for selling water: "to perfect the water rights and make sure the usage quantity is up enough to retain the rights to that water," and "to reduce the costs to ratepayers." After Hynix shut down its large consumption of water, he says, "we're paying more in our bills" and "selling water to another community is a way to defray some of those fixed costs."

Mital says he understands the economic and legal arguments, "but in theory that doesn't make a lot of sense," he says. "Even if we have some legal requirements built into it that should we ever need that water back, we can force them to turn off their water? Politically that's impossible." He says once Veneta builds an infrastructure around the availability of water, and property values and economic plans are tied to it, EWEB would not be able to reclaim the water. "So I don't understand how that preserves that water right because it's not ours any more. We've given it to Veneta."

Mital also cites concerns for urban sprawl in a bedroom community that "had some natural limits that it was bumping up against and we're finding a somewhat unnatural expansion of that limit. Is that what we really want to do? I'm a little surprised at the direction EWEB is taking."

When asked about EWEB's cash reserves, neither candidate knew how much they were, but Mital had more to say on the subject: "If you think about that \$300 million in annual operating expenses," he says, "what a financial adviser would tell you or me is you ought to keep about three months of your household expenses in the bank for whatever kind of contingencies come your way, so for EWEB that would be about \$100 million. So if they have \$10 or \$20 million in reserves that would be very conservative." EWEB spokesperson Joe Harwood says EWEB at the end of 2011 had about \$79.3 million in various reserve funds, including \$33.1 million in the "power and rate stabilization reserve."

Regarding smart meters, both candidates want to go forward with caution, particularly regarding safety, but see the long-term advantages of EWEB being able to implement time-of-day power pricing. For example, Shaver is concerned about the "tremendous amount of strain on the system" that will happen when just 10 percent of the vehicles in Eugene are electric and will require daily recharging.

Shaver is endorsed by Chris Pryor, George Poling, John Brown, John Simpson, Ron Farmer, Sandra Bishop, Mary Leighton, Munir Katul, Jack Roberts, Sue Prichard, Mark Frohnmayer, Rusty Rexus, Gerry Gados and others. See willshaver.com

Mital is endorsed by Mayor Kitty Piercy, Bob Cassidy, Dick Helgeson, Jean Tate, John Reynolds, Mel Bankoff, Tom Bowerman, Shawn Boles, Lorraine Kerwood, the *R-G*, and others. See stevemital.com



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