

Candidates from A1

to bring attention to the nation's state of division and the need to keep the Cottage Grove community united.

"I'm mostly running because I've watched politics go completely mad in the last year and I want to talk to people and say, 'We need to find a way to get along,'" he said. "I'm honestly not really running to win. I'm voting for Jeff."

Some of the following topics were discussed during the forum:

• **City Budget and Charter**
In general, candidates spoke favorably of the way the city's budget has been handled considering the year's uncertainty.

Ervin suggested increasing community promotions and investing more in the city's image while Gowing pointed out that the city has failing streets which should receive attention.

In reference to the city charter, DelSol advocated for rank-choice voting system such as STAR voting.

"I would like to see more people on the ballot and not have single entries in there to encourage participation," he said.

• **City support for business community**

Candidates agreed that the city maintained a supportive role of the business community.

Gowing and Roberts praised the city's various efforts such as the COVID-relief loan program, options for parklets and free mask distribution.

While praising the city's overall support of local businesses, DelSol expressed a need to keep vigilant of the city's focus on smaller, local businesses as opposed to larger corporate giants. He also thought greater flexibility in fixing downtown buildings would be helpful.

Ervin and Savage emphasized the importance of keeping dollars local.

"I think it's important that the dollars that we earn here are spent here," said Savage.

• **Housing**
Housing projects such as those associated with DevNW, Cottage Village and Legion Cottages received praise from candidates and there was general agreement that the city was moving in the right direction when it came to programs such as MUPTE and the Housing Development Cost Assistance Program.

"I'd like to see more low-income and affordable housing come in to balance out our work force," said Roberts.

"I think we get an A plus on housing at this point, but more is always better."

Savage made similar points in that she would like to see all kinds of housing and the city must ask itself, "How do we keep people here?"

• **Urban renewal districts**
While Savage said she would like to learn more before making a decision, both DelSol and Stinnett said they believed urban renewal efforts were worthwhile projects, but any increased taxation deserved deeper consideration.

Other candidates were more cautious about the idea, expressing a need to consider projects on a case-by-case basis.

"It's got to be a right fit for the right time for the right outcomes," said Ervin.

• **Martin v Boise Ninth Circuit Court Case**
Opinions differed on how to approach the issue of homelessness in the area.

"I would like to explore something that works to establish a permanent shelter in Cottage Grove for those who find themselves unsheltered," said Stinnett.

DelSol agreed and added his support for the city's decision to purchase Pallet Shelters.

Ervin expressed his concern about property crime

and was not in favor of a permanent shelter.

"I think the role of taking care of the poor and the destitute is incumbent upon individuals and groups of individuals banded together," he said. "And each of those individuals is part of that buy-in. I don't think it should be placed on people unwillingly. ... But compassion on an individual basis and collectively is important."

Gowing focused on seeking out the root causes of homelessness.

"I feel that we need to work on finding out why people are homeless and help them to become not homeless," he said. "If it's a drug or alcohol addiction, we need to help them some treatment and help them get back to where they can hold down a job and help them get into permanent housing."

Roberts said he wanted to see a permanent shelter with all the services people need to get back on their feet under one roof.

Savage recommended focusing on housing first so that people can bootstrap themselves through the avenue of ownership over one's growth.

• **City council relationship with city manager and community**

Candidates overall agreed

that the council is generally responsive to community concerns, but that improvements can always be made.

Special praise was given to City Manager Richard Meyers from all candidates as well.

"The city manager is the CEO of city and the city council is the board of directors basically," said Gowing. "So we're there to implement policies and procedures, but he's the one that runs the city and I think we have a really good relationship with the city council and the city manager."

• **Greatest challenge for the city**

Dealing with growth emerged as candidates' main concern among the city's challenges.

Ervin said that growth is inevitable, so determining how to create a vision for the future deserves careful attention moving forward.

Meanwhile, Roberts advocated for "balanced growth" by taking care of housing and roads, while Savage pointed to the need for a well-informed and educated approach in the face of uncertainty.

Stinnett said that establishing an identity for the community was important to fulfilling any vision of growth and inviting more voices to that discussion would aid in that endeavor.

DelSol, meanwhile, was mainly concerned with a cultural and political divide.

"The political divide has people in such a state of mistrust," he said, admonishing the politicization of issues such as wearing masks. He added that the city council can have a leadership role in establishing unity.

Finally, Gowing highlighted the financial disruption of people's lives caused by COVID-19 as his main concern.

During the audience call-in portion of the forum, candidates highlighted the limitations of the city to address specific rural concerns but pointed to some solutions.

Stinnett, DelSol and Roberts, for example, advocated for a rural representative to communicate with the city council while Ervin talked about the importance for accessibility and transportation options.

On child abuse and domestic violence in particular, candidates were supportive of better partnerships with existing programs.

Support for services such as 90by30 and Family Relief Nursery were raised as imperative to addressing the issue as well as bringing awareness of those services to the wider community.

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