

Candidates tout their strengths in forum

Topics include re-development, crime, taxes

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Although there was little animosity between Hopkins City Council candidates at a forum last week, all used the opportunity to tout their strengths and explain why they would be best for the city.

The League of Women Voters sponsored the forum, which was held Thursday, Oct. 11, at Hopkins City Hall. Mayor Gene Maxwell, who is running unopposed for re-election, attended the debate, as did all five council candidates – James Beauchene, incumbent Rick Brausen, Christian Oestreich, incumbent Bruce Rowan and Enrique Torrano. The mayor's seat and two council seats are up for election on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

The forum touched on issues such as re-development, crime, taxes and community involvement.

Rowan, who has been on the council since 2001, said the body has accomplished a lot the past four years, including the establishment of a new public-works facility, new police department and new fire department.

"I'm proud of what we've done and I think we're heading in the right direction," he said.

All those facilities have been nice additions to the city, Beauchene said, but that their costs have taken a toll on the residents – especially seniors on fixed incomes.

"Now is the time to say, 'No' – enough spending for now," he said.

Maxwell said much of the increases in property taxes have come at the state and federal level.

"We are doing a good job in Hopkins maintaining taxes," he said.

Brausen said taxes were a concern of his because property values were leveling out. The council will have to tighten the city's budget so people on fixed incomes will be able to afford to live in Hopkins, he said.

"The cost of providing services continues to rise," he said. "People are spending more than they make."

Oestreich said the city has done a good job redeveloping itself, and he'd like to see this trend continue. The council must be financially responsible when dealing with upcoming projects, he said.

"I want to make Hopkins an attractive place to live and continue providing a high quality of life," he said.

The key to success in Hopkins in the coming years will be job growth, Torrano said. A challenge is that Hopkins' land is mostly developed, he said, so the city must work within its capacity to grow its economy.

Torrano is treasurer of Meadow Creek Condominiums. He said he can bring in new ideas for the city's economy, he said. "I want to bring in business growth and fiscal responsibility," he said.

Oestreich said business growth – such as the upcoming Cargill/Excelsior Crossings office project – is important, but the city must also adhere to its traditions.

"We have to maintain that feel of Hopkins even when we bring in big businesses," he said.

Rowan praised the Hopkins Police Department for the work it has done in the last two years to cut down on crime in the Blake Road Corridor. The department, along with Hopkins Public Schools and other partners, has worked on creating programs for youth, which has helped, he said.

Brausen said City Council members should go to Hopkins' apartment complexes more often to identify residents' needs and inform them of what programs and activities are available.

"This is where the city can do a better job," he said.

One of the most important tasks the council has in the next term, Maxwell said, is writing the city's comprehensive plan – an overall vision for Hopkins for the next 10 to 20 years. The council must get as much community input as possible when formulating the document, he said.

"We have to figure out the direction we want to go," he said.

A good way to get Hopkins residents involved in their community, Beauchene said, is through the Citizen's Academy – a course that teaches about the various aspects of city government. He went through the academy himself, he said, and learned a lot.

"It's money well spent," he said. "It really does help."

Torrano said his job as a council member is to work within the position to create an environment for people to pursue happiness. He will bring commitment, common sense and ethics to the position, he said.

"I always want to get involved in my community," he said. "I'm not a politician. I know I can bring new ideas."

For more information on the council candidates, look in the *Sun-Sailor Voter's Guide*, which will publish on Oct. 25.

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