

Village candidates tough to find

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Officials can't explain why trustee positions draw such little interest

With three vacancies on the ballot and only two incumbents running, it is unlikely there will be any significant change on the Fredonia Village Board following the April 6 general election.

Trustees Don Dohrwardt and Chuck Lapicola are seeking new two-year terms on the board. Fellow incumbent Jill Bertram chose not to seek another term.

In a bit of irony, Bertram joined the board two years ago after receiving 28 write-in votes. As is the case this year, only Dohrwardt and Lapicola were on that ballot, with no one seeking the third board seat.

Village officials were at a loss to explain why the chance to serve on the Village Board has apparently failed to capture much interest in the community.

There have been few contested races in recent years and there hasn't been a primary election in more than a decade.

Village President Joe Short said the challenge of being held accountable for tough decisions in a small community may be the reason few people seek office.

"I don't think it is a matter of workload or time commitment that keep people away, because they don't realize how much work is involved in being a trustee until they get elected," Short said.

"What is especially difficult for business people from the community is sometimes having to make votes that cost them business."

Dohrwardt said he gets a common refrain when he talks to people about serving on the board.

"More than anything else, I hear people saying, 'I'm not really qualified to be a trustee.' Most people find out they are qualified, if they just give it a try," he said.

Lapicola said it could be especially difficult to find residents willing to serve as trustees during the current economic downturn, because so many have found the need to take on second jobs to cover bills.

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Dohrwardt said his dual role as a village trustee and a county supervisor has proven valuable to the community.

“I am able to import the cutting-edge strategies being developed at the county level to help the village through these challenging times,” he said.

“It will be no small chore to maintain current services without raising any taxes. But, that is my pledge — no tax increases. The taxpayers of Fredonia will gain a brighter future if we keep our heads and, together, act responsibly until this recession is over.”

Lapicola said the chance to serve the community has drawn him to elected office.

“I really like serving the village and the people of Fredonia. With me, public service is a way of life,” he said.

“I am not a ‘rules are rules,’ dictatorial type of person. I am inclusive and I want our village government to be inclusive, where the residents know the board will listen to them and try to work with them.”

Like Dohrwardt, Lapicola said the biggest challenge for the village is to maintain services without raising taxes.

“Personally, I would like to see Fredonia stay the small, wonderful town it is. I also know that change is a certainty and that Fredonia will change over time. If we work together, we can make sure that change is positive,” he said.

As for the unclaimed trustee seat, voters still have a say on who should fill the opening.

If the top write-in candidate declines the position, or if there are no write-in votes cast, the third trustee seat will be declared vacant. An appointee would then be named by the board.