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Incumbent supervisors joined by challenger in three-person bid for two Grafton board seats

Is new leadership needed to help the Town of Grafton tackle issues such as commercial development, land preservation and budget constraints?

Squaring off in a three-candidate race for Town Board in the Tuesday, April 3, election are two incumbent supervisors who want to continue helping shape the community's future and a political newcomer eager to take a leadership role.

Tom Grabow, who has served on the board since 2006, and Tom Sykora, a supervisor since 2008, are seeking new two-year terms. They are joined in the race by challenger Scott Phillips.

Grabow, a 65-year-old retiree, said he is making a re-election bid because "there is still work to be done." He cited working to hold the line on property taxes, fine-tuning long-range development plans and pushing for private well testing among his contributions in two previous terms as supervisor.

Helping the town find ways to maintain its current levels of police and fire protection, garbage collection and road improvements will be crucial in the coming years, he added.

"We're facing a lot of challenges, but we're doing a lot better now," Grabow said. "I feel 10 times better than when I started on the board."

Sykora, 50, said his background as a real-estate broker helps him understand the developmental challenges facing the town, which has lost hundreds of acres through annexations to neighboring municipalities in the past decade. Those losses have eased in recent years, in part because town officials have done a good job responding to commercial pressures, Sykora said.

"I think the town is finding ways to attract commercial business and increase our tax base," he said, citing a development plan for the I-32 corridor. "I'm really happy with the way the town is going now."

Sykora also cited his membership on the Economic Development for Grafton Enhancement group, on which he now serves as president, as a way to help ensure the town's voice is heard and its interests protected.

A major motivation for serving on the board "is to give back to a community where I live," Sykora said. "I really enjoy being part of the town."

Phillips, a 61-year-old retiree, said he's making his first bid for public office because the town can do a better job of attracting commercial development, cutting costs and improving relations with the Village of Grafton.

“I don’t really have a big problem with any of the current Town Board members, but I think we can do more,” Phillips said.

“I think we can do more to help small businesses expand, and I would like to see us stabilize taxes and not always talk about tax increases.”

Grabow said that during his time on the board, the town has made progress in working with neighboring communities, especially the village. That cooperation is crucial because of shared services such as fire protection and library services, he added.

“One of the biggest budget problems we face is legal costs. Our legal budget has tripled in the last six years,” Grabow said. “We have to keep looking at ways to reduce that.”

Grabow also said he will continue to work on cost-effective ways to upgrade town roads, another major expenditure.

Sykora said town officials have done a good job of paring costs and holding the line on taxes despite cuts in state aid.

“The town doesn’t have any full-time employees, so we can’t cut there, and our services are basic and have to be maintained,” Sykora said. “Fortunately, the town can still borrow at a very low rate.”

Although Phillips has only lived in the town for two years, he said he appreciates its rural character and would work hard to preserve it as a board member. He also voiced concern about residents facing fee increases for local services, including recreation programs.

“The average person is having to pay more and more. We’ve got to find a way to stabilize costs,” Phillips said.

Town supervisors are paid $4,800 per year.