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Tough challenges await winners of election that has incumbents, former trustee vying for three seats

Leadership roles in a community tackling challenges such as commercial development, budget constraints and the future of a landmark dam lie at the heart of a race for the Grafton Village Board this spring.

Incumbent trustees David Liss, Susan Meinecke and Lisa Uribe Harbeck are joined by challenger Scott Volkert, a former trustee, in a four-person race in the Tuesday, April 3, election. The top three vote-getters will win two-year terms.

The incumbents each cited their work in helping the village attract and retain businesses and holding the line on taxes without cutting essential services.

Volkert, who did not seek re-election in 2010 after serving on the board for six years, said he is eager to return to office.

Liss, 36, has been a trustee since 2006 and said hw wants another two-year term “to be able to see things through that we’ve started.” He cited a need for continued leadership in promoting downtown redevelopment and finding “an equitable resolution to the future of the Bridge Street dam.”

Since voters decided in a 2010 binding referendum to preserve the dam until at least 2019, the village has explored ways to upgrade the structure to meet state flood-control requirements. The Department of Natural Resources is requiring the village to install a floodgate, but the village asked the agency to reconsider its decision, which is expected to cost at least $300,000.

“It’s kind of wait-and-see right now, but if we have to put a gate in, we have to find ways to pay for it,” Liss said.

Liss said he is proud of his work in helping the village oversee development of the Grafton Commons shopping center and construction of the Aurora Medical Center. He said his priorities include working to attract businesses to the south commercial district and helping ensure the success of downtown redevelopment projects, including the renovation of the Grafton Hotel.

Meinecke, 42, said she wants to continue serving on a board “that is really working well together now.“

“We’re been through a lot of things, and we’ve been able to work together to get things done,” she added.

Meinecke said her top priority will be protecting municipal services that are “true to our core,” singling out police, public safety, public works and water and wastewater operations.

“I think we need to manage the Village Board the same way families do, by making sure we spend money on essentials first,” she said.

Meinecke, who has been a trustee since 2007, said the DNR requiring a floodgate on the dam is “a huge waste of taxpayer money.” She also praised the work of village officials in trying to minimize the financial impact of dam repairs.

“Hopefully, we will be able to find a way to keep the cost down,” she said.

Meinecke said stable leadership on the board will be crucial as the village tackles budget constraints, including rising costs and cuts in state aid.

“The budget is going to be tight again, and we need to look at improving efficiency,” she said. “We need to streamline how we do things and start cross-training staff to do more than one job.”

Uribe Harbeck, 54, won her first term on the board in 2010 after working to preserve the Bridge Street dam as a member of the Save the Dam Association. She said she wants to be re-elected “because I’m just getting started.”

“I know so much more now, and I realize there’s a lot more work to be done,” Uribe Harbeck said.

She voiced frustration about DNR requirements for dam work. “I’m not accepting it. I think the answer is to keep going hard and fast until we can get them to understand the dam is safe and doesn't need all this,” she said.

Uribe Harbeck said the village will continue to face tough budget challenges that will require more spending cuts.

“I think there are departments we can really cut back on,” she said. “If we have a limited budget, we just have to get by with less. Maybe we don’t need as much new equipment every year.”

Uribe Harbeck said the village needs to be more proactive in attracting businesses to the downtown and south commercial district. “I think we really need to be open with businesses and companies and tell them what we have to offer,” she said.

For Volkert, 45, the election is a chance to resume a leadership role he gave up two years ago.

“I believe in term limits, and I decided to give someone else a chance after I served for several years,” he said. “But I had a lot of people in the community who suggested I should go back.”

Volkert said his campaign isn’t based “on any one issue,” but emphasizes his willingness “to listen to both sides before making a decision.”

He said he wants the village to work to attract businesses “that bring something unique and different to the community" and to take a stronger stand against multifamily housing

development.

“I think we have to go back to our village surveys that said people want to see more single-family houses,” Volkert staid.

Volkert said saving the dam will probably cost more money than originally believed, but the village has to make the best of the situation. “If the majority of the village felt it should be saved, then we’re going to have to figure out ways to do it and save money,” he said.

As village officials grapple with budget cutbacks, they need to make essential services the top priority, Volkert said. “I can’t see us cutting back on any kind of safety expenditures, police or fire,” he said.