

Voices & Opinion

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ELECTION 2016: OUR ENDORSEMENTS

Plantation council may have new look

Plantation is not a city that is used to big changes, but some are happening.

Demolition of the long-vacant Fashion Mall on University Drive north of Broward Boulevard started this summer, part of a \$300 million redevelopment with 700 units of luxury apartments, new offices and retail stores. Plantation General Hospital, long a landmark in the city, is moving to a new, upgraded facility at Nova Southeastern University in Davie.

There isn't even that much change in government. Frank Levy was mayor for almost a quarter of a century. The present mayor is his daughter, Diane Veltri Bendekovic.

There are 85,000 residents, but Plantation likes to think of itself as a small town. The city website boasts, "Welcome to the City of Plantation, where the grass is greener." Some of the most popular people in town are the members of the city's very efficient volunteer fire department.

With all of that, there could be some change in November, as residents will elect three council members, and all three incumbents have challengers. Elections are city-wide, and the "groups" are nonpartisan seats.

GROUP 3

Two good candidates are running for this position. The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board thinks political newcomer Michael Tausig can bring fresh ideas to City Hall. He is our choice over incumbent Rob Jacobs.

Tausig, 52, has been a member of the volunteer fire department for 31 years. He is passionate about the city and equally passionate about being fiscally responsible. As revenue from property taxes goes up because prop-

erty values are increasing, he believes the city needs to be vigilant in reducing the tax rate. If the Plantation bond issues fail, he wants to find other revenue that does not add an additional tax burden to residents, such as corporate sponsorships of fields and parks.

He is opposed to the one-penny sales tax on the ballot in November. He also knows that quality-of-life issues are critical to Plantation residents, but, "We need some new out-of-the-box thinking." "I just don't trust the county with the sales tax," he said.

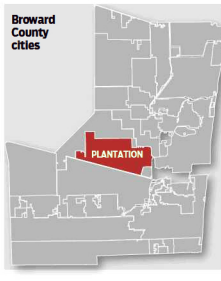
Not surprisingly, he also views public safety as a crucial issue for residents.

Jacobs, 63, simply doesn't show the enthusiasm needed for the job or to keep leading the city forward. He gives the impression of a "sit on your laurels" type. After 15 years on the council, he has done service for the residents, but we would prefer to hear Michael Tausig's new voice.

GROUP 4

Chris Zimmerman, 57, is the incumbent, but responds with the enthusiasm of someone running for the first time. As a small business owner, he wants to help bring more business to the city. As an architect, he also has good knowledge of city codes, ordinances and development plans.

One of his key issues involves the "Hyatt Extreme Christmas"



house, which the city has been trying to scale back. Mark Hyatt, who owns the house, is running against Zimmerman. Because of court appearances associated with the "extreme" house, Hyatt did not show up for his interview with the editorial board.

"My opponent put himself above the rules and residents when it comes to being a good neighbor," Zimmerman said. "Mr. Hyatt's disregard of neighborhood values has cost the city tens of thousands of dollars while he tries to avoid compliance.

"We're not looking to shut it down, but it ruins the citizens' right to enjoy their own property."

Indeed, Hyatt has shown little regard for the quality of life in his neighborhood. He puts his interests first.

Chris Zimmerman is clearly the best choice in Group 4.

GROUP 5

This may be the best of the city's three council races.

Incumbent Bob Levy and challenger Jerry Faden — who over the course of the past 21 years, has served 18 years (or five terms) on the council — are friends who share many of the same views. It's a shame they are running for the same seat, because both have shown they are capable of doing the job well.

Levy gets the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board's endorsement because of his ability to keep looking forward to help citizens maintain the quality of life the city offers.

"I'm focusing on our water needs," Levy, 74, told the editorial board. "We need to start planning to make sure we don't have water coming out of the wrong aquifer. We don't want to be Flint."

Levy, who also is the Town Manager of Pembroke Park, wants to see continued economic revitalization of the Gateway 7 area on State Road 7. He also wants to secure the equestrian nature of the Plantation Acres area.

Levy would like to see an assisted living facility on the site of Plantation General, which is moving to the campus of Nova Southeastern. Though concerned about the economic effect of the hospital's departure, he is pleased with the city's current financial situation. "We went from \$1 million in reserve to \$7 million in

reserve."

Faden, 70, is a noted fiscal conservative who opposes the penny sales tax. He wants the city to become more business-friendly, and is an advocate for strong code enforcement.

Plantation residents can't go wrong in this race, but the editorial board believes Levy has earned another term.

VOTE NO ON BONDS

In addition to picking three council members, Plantation residents will vote on three bonds that would pay for costs associated with parks and recreation, public works and public safety.

The bonds, which would be paid back over 20 years, total \$60 million. If all three are approved, homeowners could be charged 41 cents for every \$1,000 of assessed value. A house valued at \$200,000 with a \$50,000 homestead exemption would pay an additional \$6.50 a year in taxes.

Many incumbent council members and those running for office say that if the one-penny sales tax passes and Plantation receives money for infrastructure needs, the city could borrow less than \$60 million and use the sales-tax money to make up the difference. But there is no guarantee of that, and no matter how you look at it, we are talking about double dipping.

"There's probably a bit of overload," Councilwoman Lynn Stoner said.

If the penny tax for transportation and infrastructure fails, the city can always bring the bond issues back to city residents.

For now, the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board encourages Plantation citizens to vote NO vote on the proposed bonds.