

# Candidates share views at local forum

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Area residents had the opportunity to interact with candidates from two of the upcoming races last week during a forum sponsored by the VCDC Legislative Affairs Committee.

Central ward city councilor Jenny French and challenger Kelsey Collier-Wise both were present, as were current school board member Dave Stammer and hopeful Tim Schwasinger.

Mark Bottolfson, the other school board incumbent, was unable to attend.

## VERMILLION CITY COUNCIL

One of the major topics addressed by the city candidates was affordable local housing, which French called one of her main priorities.

Simply put, the city can not grow if more options do not become available, she said.

"We can't offer jobs if we don't have the appropriate housing for the job categories," French said.

The issue puts the city in "a tough position," she said, because "we don't want to be in competition with private businesses and developers."

At the same time, French said there needs to be an option available for people with \$15-\$20 an hour salaries who don't want to live in the same buildings as college students.

Collier-Wise said that the city has acknowledged the housing issue, but "recognizing that it's an issue doesn't really solve the problem."

She said the city needs to take a stronger role in zoning to decide what kinds of buildings can be built, and where the construction should take place.

"A lot of that is going to be dictated by a plan going forward that recognizes the kinds of people and businesses we want to draw here, and what this town is going to look like at the end of it," Collier-Wise said.

French said this process already has been initiated.

"We are working with Vermillion NOW! and the chamber and development company (distributing) surveys to find out exactly what kind of housing, what size, what price range will work," she said. "It's just kind of keeping the push on, trying to get some developers working with Steve (Howe) at the chamber, just to try and move forward."

Collier-Wise is a long-time resident of the community, attending both Vermillion High School and the USD School of Law.



COLLIER-WISE

She said she wants to promote greater community involvement, along with sustainability.

"(I want) to improve communications between the city council and the citizens," Collier-Wise said. "I feel like a lot of people don't really know what's going on at the city level, and really don't care. ..."

"Unfortunately, I think we lose out on a lot of new ideas and new possibilities because we don't have that feedback from the community," she said.

French came to Vermillion as a student in the late 1980s, and has served on the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the planning and zoning commission.

She said the community has seen many positive changes over the past four years, from the arrival of new businesses to the current library expansion and the plan to construct a new swimming pool.



FRENCH

"There's just a lot of positives going on," French said. "I feel our current city council has worked well as a group. We've also worked well with other groups."

## VERMILLION SCHOOL BOARD

Financial discussions were on the table between the school board candidates, with both Stammer and Schwasinger agreeing that proper budgeting is imperative.

A question was put forth regarding the possibility of spending some reserve funds in FY2013.

Stammer said the board has been budgeting reserve funds for the past couple of years.

"One of the things our staff is great about is, we budget high and we spend low, and that's the way you're supposed to do a budget," he said.

He added that he thinks the board is actually going to spend



SCHWASINGER

into its reserves this year, and is "quite certain" the same thing will happen next year, as well.

"Our reserves are healthy, but they're not overly healthy," Stammer said. "We do have 20-21 percent of our reserves, but that's what our reserves are there for."

"These times right now are difficult to make our budgets meet. So, if you're have the money, spend it as long as you're still financially sound, and right now we are financially sound," he said.

Schwasinger said he agreed with Stammer's philosophy.

"If you have too-healthy reserves ... it would lead to a lot of questions," he said. "Times are tough, so now's the time to (use them) if that's what it takes to offer programs to our children, and to attract businesses to our community."

The candidates also spoke of how they plan to



STAMMER

strike a balance between academic and activity budgets.

Schwasinger, director of patient accounts at Yankton's Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, said cooperation needs to take place between the state and local level.

"We at the education level have to continue to work with our state legislature, help them find ways to help us find successful ways to get funding, and then made local decisions on what to fund," he said.

Stammer, who has lived in Vermillion since

the early 1990s and worked with such organizations as the Girl Scouts and Special Olympics, said the school's current activities budget is about \$330,000.

"It sounds like a lot of money, but in the grand scheme of our budget, it's probably about three to maybe five percent," he said. "Five percent is probably pushing it. It's not a huge percentage amount, but it is something that you have to look at when you're a slowly-shrinking school."

A lot of the school's funding is determined by population, and the number of students has been shrinking "the last decade or more," Stammer said.

He said he hopes that with the expansion of local businesses, more families will be drawn back.

The forum was moderated by Ted Muenster of the USD Foundation.

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