

## District 1 candidates face voters

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write the author

November 02, 2007

The candidate forum at Brandon Hall School Sunday night Oct. 28 was the only opportunity for voters in Sandy Springs Council District 1 to hear the contenders' views on issues facing the city and ask questions.

The four candidates, Elizabeth Huffner, Doug MacGinnitie, Mark Thomas and Vicki Willard, for the most part sounded like they agreed with each other on just about every issue discussed.

The lack of a large turnout at the forum suggested the majority of residents in the district may not care which of the candidates represents them during the remaining two years in the term of former Councilman Dave Greenspan. The election is Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Except for one question asked by five members of the audience of candidate Vicki Willard, all candidates answered the same questions as posed to them by moderator Larry Young, president of the Sandy Springs Council of Neighborhoods and a city judge.

That one question posed to Willard was how she answers concerns about any potential conflict of interest if she is elected, since her husband is the city's attorney.

Her answer: She has had the ethics code checked by several outside legal sources and has been assured there is no conflict of interest issue.

When the other candidates were asked if they had any comment regarding that issue, MacGinnitie had no response, Huffner said it is a question she hears asked often as she campaigns, and Thomas told the voters to read the conflict of interest ordinance if they have concerns about it.

One of the other major points that caused some dissension among the four candidates arose when MacGinnitie suggested the council needs to review the contract with CH2MHill to ensure that the city continues to be the center of their attention and is getting service proportionate to the \$25 million being paid to the firm managing the city's service departments and operations.

The relationship "needs to monitored and reviewed" Mac Ginnitie said.

Thomas agreed that the relationship needs oversight, but Huffner said she "thinks it has gone well....It is looked at as a test case." Willard said CH2MHill "has done a wonderful job." She said they bring flexibility to the operation because of the wide variety of expertise the company offers and "they can reallocate staff as needed."

All of the candidates felt the drought and the issue of a lack of future water supply is a regional issue and that the city needs to work with neighbors to find solutions to those problems. However, Willard offered that the city is right now working on an emergency plan to use the city's fire department to help fulfill the city's water needs in a crisis.

On the dog park issue, there were varying degrees of interest among the candidates, with Huffner and Willard probably having the most interest in a dog park and MacGinnitie and Thomas less enthused.

But MacGinnitie said he would never vote to pay \$200,000 for a dog park.

Asked for their opinions on allowing adult entertainment businesses to continue operating in the city and about bar closing hours, Huffner said she feels the one promise council reneged on is shutting down adult entertainment businesses. As far as bar closing hours, she said, "Nothing good happens after midnight."

Thomas said he feels there are laws on the books already that would allow closing down the adult entertainment establishments. Willard favors closing them down, but said, "It's just not that simple."

MacGinnitie told the group, "To the extent we can close them and move them out, we should."

All four candidates urged the audience to get their friends out to vote Nov. 6. It was pointed out that if there is a runoff required, District 1 may not have any representation when council votes on the new Comprehensive Development Plan.