

Editorial: A Free-For-All Council Race



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It was a heartening sight to see Falls Church's former Vice Mayor Lindy Hockenberry continuing to circulate her petition to run for the City Council in May at the Mason High boys basketball game Tuesday night.

Hockenberry did not take her failure to win the backing of F.C.'s Citizens for a Better City (CBC) last weekend as the final word on whether or not she will seek a third term on the Council. We are happy she's pushing ahead.

Incumbent Councilman Dan Sze may follow suit, being the other veteran of Council wars who could not pass muster at the CBC convention last weekend. Current Vice Mayor Hal Lippman was the only one of the CBC's four nominees from that meeting with any prior experience on the City Council, although we are pleased that current School Board Chair Ron Peppe was also among the choices. While two of the CBC's newcomer choices, Planning Commission Chair John Lawrence, and long-time civic activist Barry Buschow, have touted their support for the City's schools, their histories concerning the kind of practical, doable economic development in the City needed to generate revenues, to keep the schools strong, are cause for concern.

With Hockenberry and possibly Sze in the race, each running as independents, and with Councilman David Snyder seeking a fifth term and citizen Johanna Barry likely to throw a hat in the ring, the eight-person campaign leading to the May 4 election this year could be the most interesting in the City's history. In tough economic times like these, with the City facing excruciating decisions to close the gap on a 15 percent differential between revenues and expenditures by April, such a wide open race could be the healthiest for the City's future. This newspaper also encourages any other citizens who are considering jumping into this race, noting there is still time before the March 2 deadline to officially file.

Under these circumstances, it is unlikely the CBC slate of the four candidates it endorsed last Saturday will come through the electoral process with a clean sweep. Snyder has often been the top single vote getter in Council elections, and parents and others in the community who recognize the "value added" that schools bring to real estate and other assets in the City will not necessarily find their best choices on the CBC's slate.

Therefore, just as with the tough choices that the budget deliberations will force upon us this spring, citizens of Falls Church must apply the same value decisions to the City Council race. What "lines of service" do our citizens prize most when push comes to shove? Which matter most when they will be asked to pay more for them? It will be hard for citizens to ante up more to keep the quality of their schools and the economic development to under gird them, for example, and then turn around and vote for candidates who doesn't share that vision.



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