

Ist Time In Public

Trustee Candidates Debate Police Issue

FARMINGTON
The four candidates for two Farmington Township trustee positions engaged in a spirited debate during the Meet the Candidates Night held by the West Bloomfield-Farmington Area League of Women Voters with roads, drains, police and zoning being the main issues covered.

About 50 persons attended the meeting in the Farmington Community Center to hear from the four trustee candidates: William Hatton, Democrat; Dr. Burton Levy, Democrat; Earl Opperthaus, Republican incumbent; and L. David Stader, Republican.

The board will have at least one new trustee after Nov. 3 because Thomas Nolan is running for treasurer instead of seeking reelection as trustee.

Each candidate was given five minutes for an opening statement and three minutes each to answer questions from the audience. League members moderated and collected the questions which were given in writing.

HATTON BEGAN by complimenting the township planning commission for developing what he described as a good master plan but said it was too bad the plan took three years instead of 12 or 18 months to complete.

"Public service, zoning actions and police service can be improved," said Hatton, particularly in regard to their PR aspects.

"The public interests should be paramount in the minds of all our employees and elected officials."

Hatton then criticized the present administration for doing nothing on drainage. "The drainage problem should have been acted upon many years ago. The City of Farmington in 30 days has whipped

up a hairbrain drainage program which I think is quite unworkable."

Turning to roads, Hatton said the county spends \$120,000 a year for maintenance of township roads and the township spends almost twice as much each year on roads.

"The township road committee has yet to make a recommendation after a year of meetings. There seems to be a timidity on the part of the administration to find a solution."

The present administration lacks an appreciation of the current problems and lacks the ability to find solutions, Hatton concluded. "When there is a sufficient will there will be solution to our problems."

LEVY OPENED by describing the present administration as a "do-nothing" administration because it is unable to meet the demands of the 70s.

"Things aren't what they were 10 years ago. The township has not dealt with commercialization and zoning problems. This administration has been in office for 12 years and only in the past 30 days did they come up with a sign ordinance."

"Present zoning allows small businesses on a strip basis along Orchard Lake Rd. and I certainly don't want this to spread to my mile roads."

Levy then turned to discussion of problems facing the police department. "All of us here know police and law enforcement is an issue."

He pointed out the police review board was formed a year ago but has met only twice for organizational purposes. Levy added that Opperthaus was an original member of the police review board appointed by Supervisor Curtis Hall.

Levy said it is important to

know who is running the township police department. "Who's running the department? Is it the POA or POA attorney? Or is the township board or supervisor running the department? Or is it the police chief?"

Levy said he believed no one is running the police department and then added that only the police chief should run the force. The department needs better leadership, more training and aggressive recruiting to get the best people on the force, Levy added.

"The police need community support and the community needs a good police department. But this administration has not met its responsibility and I certainly hope the next administration will deal with the township as it is now and as it is going to be."

OPPERTHAUS was next to speak and began by saying: "I am a Republican and am running on the Republican ticket. I'm proud of the fact I'm a Republican because the Republican philosophy stands for fiscal responsibility, individual initiative and self-help."

Opperthaus says he plans to remain a Republican and will speak and began by saying: "My opponent has signs posted illegally on the public right-of-way and I have to get out of my car and walk up to the poster to see the small letters which read 'Democrat'."

Opperthaus disagreed with Levy that party labels were not important on the local level.

"The words Democrat and Republican are not just labels but philosophies. He said philosophies don't apply on the township level because township parties do not write platforms. Well, you don't have to reduce it to writing to have a philosophy."

Opperthaus said the zoning issues have been created because for 12 years the township has been trying to avoid annexation by incorporating or consolidating. "How can you plan zoning, roads, water and drains until you protect your boundaries?" he asked.

STADER said he doesn't like politics or campaigns but is running for trustee because he has an interest in the community.

"I am a Republican because I don't believe in spending more than you have, because I think capitalism is better than socialism, and because I don't think we should give away our freedoms to the labor unions or to welfare agencies."

The character of the candidate elected is more im-

portant than what the man says he will do if elected, Stader continued. "There is a great credibility gap between what the candidate promises during the campaign and what is realized when he takes office."

Persons elected must be sincere, have integrity and not act until all the facts are known, he added. "When you are on the outside looking in, you don't have all the facts."

"To present yourself as something you are not and to talk about issues beyond the scope of control of the office you seek does not help the community," Stader exclaimed.

Boundary protection is of ultimate importance, he continued, and the township form of government is fast becoming obsolete.

"We must adopt a master drainage district but it must be done with the cooperation of Oakland County and neighboring communities."

Stader concluded that integrity in government was his primary concern. Stader said he supports open meetings, a conflict of interest ordinance and a broader publication of legal notices of public hearings.

THE FIRST question asked was would partisan elections be held once the township became a city?

Opperthaus said he does not have a definite position at this point but can see nothing wrong

with publicly declaring which party you belong to the voters can know your philosophy about government.

The issue is not which party you belong to but what you can do if elected, countered Levy. Township voters will vote for the best man regardless of party labels, he continued.

"You don't want a southern constituency here. We must campaign on issues and not try to decide of a candidate is a Nixon, Scranton, Lindsay, or Romney Republican. I've worked with both parties and we must work with people here in the township, not parties."

Stader said he saw nothing wrong with partisan elections but agreed that to elect the best man for the office it was good, at times, to cross party lines.

"But, why hide what you are?" Hatton demanded Democrats are hiding their labels but added:

"Partisanship is just a lot of logwash and we all know it."

Township issues cut across party lines, said Hatton, who noted all candidates were opposed to annexation and want better government.

"Some of us are offering excuses for the present administrators and some are not. This is the real issue."

ANOTHER QUESTION asked why the township has been unable to develop parks and playgrounds?

Opperthaus answered that

eight years ago a millage proposition for parks was placed on the ballot and defeated by residents.

"You must get the millage to do what you want. But it was defeated and, consequently, there is no money available to develop township parks."

Opperthaus promised that if residents petitioned for park millage the board would put the question on the ballot.

Hatton said it was not true the township did not have money for parks. He said on March 31, 1969, the township had a surplus of \$91,500 transferred to the building and improvement fund and on March 30, 1970, another surplus of \$119,000 transferred to the revolving fund.

"We do have the money for park projects but the supervisor and his administration are not for public parks," Hatton added.

Levy criticized Opperthaus's position on parks saying: "We elect people to provide leadership and programs and if officials don't live up to their duties you kick them out."

"But Mr. Opperthaus is satisfied to sit still on parks because eight years ago a millage was voted down. People don't have the time or access to all the information public officials have to run government by petition. That's why they elect leaders."

Stader said the ad-

ministration has done a good job but he was running because he felt some things can be done better.

Stader said the cost of developing parks has been placed upon the developers of subdivisions and cited the PUD and PRD ordinances as two examples.

"Parks can be developed through the open space concept, Stader said, but to have areas wide parks the people must vote the money to do it."

ANOTHER QUESTION asked concerned the township's police review board and its function. Opperthaus said that, in case of the two shooting incidents recently, the administration immediately called in the state police for an impartial investigation.

He mentioned that William Sonnenberg had been acquitted and suggested the county prosecutor was "overzealous" with that incident.

"The preliminary examination was held to determine what the prosecutor should have determined in the first place — was there enough evidence for a trial?"

"When a police officer has to defend himself, we shouldn't criticize them," Opperthaus concluded.

LEVY NOTED that six weeks after the two shootings occurred it was Opperthaus who, as a

trustee, called for an immediate investigation on the quality of command leadership in the township police department.

"Either we have good leadership or we don't. He can't have it both ways."

Hatton said the police problems stem from the lack of a proper administration. "The board doesn't set policies now but let's the supervisor play the game by ear. The board has the responsibility to write policy but has abdicated its responsibility."

Stader answered: "It is too obvious that we have some kind of a problem in our police department but I don't know all the facts."

Stader said he felt an investigation of command quality in the police force was proper and added the police manual was passed by the board and apparently is very difficult to enforce.

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