

A look at the April election

Written by Sean Green
Thursday, 28 February 2013 16:17 -

Mayor, majority of council get free ride while two districts up for grabs

For Bossier City's mayor and lion's share of city councilmen, the April 6 election will be automatic, while two districts will see challengers to the seats.

Mayor Lorenz "Lo" Walker, District 2 Councilman Jeffery Darby, District 3 Councilman Don "Bubba" Williams, and councilmen at large David Montgomery, Jr. and Tim Larkin will not face any opposition as they reclaim their seats. Even District 4's election is definite with Jeff Free replacing retiring councilman David Jones.

"I'm elated to not have to go through the politicking process," said Walker. "I think this says that overall, the citizens are pleased with the way they perceive the city to be growing and don't feel like challenging the leadership. That is a testimony to the department heads and the working relationship between my administration and the city council as well as the city's relationship with other governing bodies."

District 2 Councilman Jeffrey Darby said he is "totally appreciative" of his district's residents.

"It's always been my goal to serve everyone and the honor of running unopposed is icing on the cake," he said. "I hope it means they feel as though I have served as though they wanted to be served. I always felt I am not a politician but servant, so if I continue to serve, that's why I (will) still be here."

At-Large Councilman David Montgomery, Jr. said his unopposed run for the seat hopefully means the public believes he's done a good job.

"As a team, the city council has done a great job of managing our money and living within our means while still maintaining the level of service to the citizens of Bossier City," said Montgomery.

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At-Large Councilman Tim Larkin said he is grateful to the citizens for giving him the opportunity to continue serving them.

“It is my hope that the absence of opposition is, in fact, an expression of satisfaction that the citizens have with the results they see, day to day in our City,” said Larkin. “My personal satisfaction comes from learning that those expectations (of voters) have been met.”

Jones is retiring after what has largely been a prosperous and busy 16 years.

“It's been very rewarding and I've enjoyed public service but I'm just tired and it's time for someone new to have the hot seat,” he said. “I think we've done some great things the past 16 years and I'm glad to have been a part of it.”

Jones said he is “delighted” Free would be taking District 4.

“It's been a dream of mine the last 10-plus years and the timing was never right, but I love the city of Bossier and I am just excited to serve,” said Free.

The soon-to-be councilman has been attending meetings since July in order to get acclimated to ordinances and see what is in the works, and is now learning directly from the council. He realizes he has a lot to live up to, taking Jones' spot.

“I've got a lot to live up to. David has done a great job and I've been very pleased with David and the Council. I hope to just accent on what they've created and run with the torch,” said Free.

District 5 incumbent Larry Hanisee will face opposition from UPS store Owner and Air Force Veteran Tommy Harvey and Mischa Angel.

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Since he was elected in October 2011 to replace Chubby Knight, Hanisee said there have been a lot of good things happening in Bossier.

“I think it's gone good, I've gone through a learning curve. Even though I was here before, things have changed. A lot of things have come up we've taken care of and I'm proud to be serving the citizens of Bossier,” he said.

“I've been representing the citizens of District 5 and we've gotten numerous complaints and I've gotten them addressed through the administration and city workers,” he added.

He plans to focus on the downtown area and riverfront, traffic, and keep things running smoothly in the city.

“I'll be working on trying to get the road completed in front of the Boardwalk, going to continue working on the traffic situation on Airline Drive to tweak that,” said Hanisee. “Bossier is ahead of the game in both the sewer and water areas. I'm proud we have a balanced budget and make sure we work within that budget.”

Harvey will challenge Hanisee a second time after only losing by two votes the last time voters hit the booths.

“District 5 is growing and we've got issues with aging infrastructure — our sewers and water lines in Green Acres are having major issues — and I'm real pleased to see the city is very proactive in that,” said Harvey.

The retired USAF Chief MSgt. moved back to Bossier in 1999 after previously serving three tours at Barksdale Air Force Base. He became involved in politics with the 2009 proposal that would have cut fire and police positions to balance the budget.

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"I hadn't seen a lot of activity out of (district's) council members and I figured it was time I stepped up," said Harvey.

After walking the district and keeping notes from concerned citizens during his previous campaign, he wants to fulfill the desire for district meetings expressed to him while talking to residents. One example of these concerns is drivers speeding and running stop signs on Melrose Avenue in the Green Acres neighborhood.

"Their concerns are real and it's a dangerous situation that needs to be addressed with kids playing on that road," said Harvey. "There's some measures that citizens of that neighborhood need to be involved in and a meeting would be appropriate."

He also thinks the council can better illustrate its plans for construction and improvements to the public.

"There are many ways you can put (expansion of a waterline for example) on an overhead and show your audience what you're looking at."

Angel has been a realtor in the local market for 35 years and thinks her role as a businesswoman would be a breath of fresh air for the council.

"I've been selling homes for years and been out in the public and talking with people every day and I had a lot of clients say they thought a woman on the city council would be good thing and I thought throwing my hat in the ring could bring something new to the council," she said.

She believes her experiences would give a unique perspective.

"The council has done a good job. I'm running to help the city do even better and grow," said Angel. "Bossier is exciting and there's been a lot of growth. Everyone is excited about growth because the more business we have, the more sales tax we have and that means lower taxes

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on them.”

“I feel like as citizens, we should give back and this is one way to do that,” she added.

District 2 will also be up for grabs with incumbent Scott Irwin drawing opposition in the form of longtime south Bossier resident Mike Beam.

Irwin said he has communicated with south Bossier citizens about their concerns and feels he has a grasp on what they want.

“The South Bossier Citizens' Assembly has a board made up of all the neighborhoods and those people are my eyes and ears and they let me know when there's problems,” said Irwin.

He pointed out the major accomplishments since his time on the council — work done to extend Arthur Ray Teague Parkway, the new park south of Bossier City moving in, and his effort to repair streets and sidewalks.

“I've worked hard for the people of south Bossier and we've seen tremendous results,” said Irwin. “I hear the people on Highway 71, (the parkway extension) is going to give them relief. I've been a champion of parks and now the families will (have a park with 17 fields, walking trails, lights) five minutes from their homes.”

Beam retired from Bossier City Police Department after 24 years and began running his family's restaurant, Beam's, shortly thereafter when his father passed away.

“I grew up here, my family helped to make south Bossier what it is, this is my home, I've been serving people all my life — in the restaurant business and as police officer — and I want to serve the citizens of Bossier City,”

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He knows his main challenge will be catching up to speed with the council but has been researching and talking to people in various forms of government. Said his experience of working with various law enforcement agencies will help him if he were to be elected to the council.

“You're just one vote, it's team work and I've done that all my life. I feel that I can work with the rest of the council,” said Beam. “It's not for the fame or the glory, it's for the good of the citizens and as long as you do that, you're successful. It takes teamwork.”

[Editor's note: A call to Councilman Williams was not returned before press time.]