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Matoaca supervisor candidates debate the issues



Durfee



Jones



Tubbs



Hastings

By Greg Pearson
STAFF WRITER

The candidates for supervisor in Matoaca District – Independent Marlene Durfee, Democrat Bill Hastings, Independent Eli Jones and Republican Mark Tubbs – responded to questions last Wednesday in a public debate at Cosby High School held by the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce. Here are the candidate's edited responses to those questions:

It has been suggested that the county budget should only grow at the combined rate of population growth plus inflation. Do you agree?

Tubbs: We need to audit the budget to target our spending priorities with input from the citizens. We need to control growth and spending and cut taxes.

Hastings: The board each year looks at the budget to determine the tax rate at that particular time. We need low taxes and a wise budget.

One of my top priorities will be police salaries to fully fund the recommendations of the retention committee of the police department. Not being able to retain police officers is a public safety issue.

Jones: I don't agree. Population and inflation are just one small part of the equation. Libraries, for example, would not benefit from such a formula. The budget should be looked at as an entirety.

Durfee: I do not agree. We need a comprehensive audit of the county

budget. It grew 15 percent last year. We need to meet the public service needs of our citizens, but we need to trim the fat.

What on your resume qualifies you to be one of five elected supervisors to lead a county with a \$1.2 billion budget?

Hastings: Two-thirds of the county budget goes to the school system, and I have been a teacher for 33 years. I can bring that experience to bear. In 2004, I helped get

the school bond referendum passed. I have some business experience in my youth.

Jones: It's not what's on my resume but what's not on my resume. You get someone who is fresh and wants to hear what you want to say. I have attended one year of law school. You know better than I do how to manage your money, so I'll listen to you.

Durfee: I entered the public

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Commission faults reservoir plan

Some members say it provides less protection

By Greg Pearson
STAFF WRITER

The Chesterfield Planning Commission says the new Upper Swift Creek Plan approved by the board of supervisors earlier this month inadequately protects the Swift Creek Reservoir as a source of drinking water for the county. Some commissioners believe the plan provides fewer safeguards than the previous plan.

"It was four years wasted," said Matoaca Planning Commissioner Wayne Bass. "We spent a lot of

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Lisa Billings/Chesterfield Observer

County commissioners are questioning the value of the Upper Swift Creek Plan recently approved by the board of supervisors. Some say the new plan offers fewer safeguards than the previous 1997 version.

Moving in

Apartment living is becoming more common in Chesterfield

By Betsy McElfresh
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Whether you are starting out or scaling back, Chesterfield County has a lot more to offer than single-family homes in sprawling developments. Apartment communities are becoming more common, providing residents with all the luxuries of higher-end living, but without the headaches of homeownership.

Apartment living was a good fit for Janet Johnston. She decided last summer to simplify her housing to match her lifestyle. A single mom with two teenagers, Johnston has owned several houses over the years; her last one was a 2,300-square-foot

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Lisa Billings/Chesterfield Observer

Janet Johnston and her children, Olivia and Levi, play with their new puppy, Toby.



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service world in 1981 and have led many programs and managed many budgets. I was involved with cystic fibrosis for all of Louisiana and worked in the public and private sector. I have worked with budgets and analyzed budgets.

Tubbs: A look at my resume shows a far-reaching depth of personal and professional experiences in senior management positions in the public and private sectors managing budgets in the millions of dollars. I've cut budgets 15-25 percent and still met the responsibilities. I have a master's degree in business administration.

Should residential rezonings be denied if they are in an area where the roads are considered inadequate and the schools have more children than their capacities?

Jones: We can put a neighborhood on hold if there aren't enough classrooms. I do not support the unlimited growth that has caused problems for our roads and schools. We need responsible growth and not have growth that puts money in the county's pockets.

Durfee: The board has the legal right to pass, deny or defer rezonings for up to 12 months if the infrastructure is not there. In high growth areas with school capacity at 148 percent, we should take a hard look at if we can provide the school infrastructure soon enough to accommodate that residential rezoning.

Tubbs: I would look at the recommendation of the planning staff and planning commission and objectively evaluate the data that is presented. We don't want overcrowded schools and congested roads. Each case should be evaluated individually. Staff and the commission should be used to make those informed decisions.

Hastings: We need common sense growth, and each case is different based on where it is. I would support a rezoning in the northern part of Matoaca District as positive development with the Watkins Centre - particularly commercial and office space. Ettrick needs redevelopment. There are differences between Ettrick, the 360 corridor and the Watkins Centre area.

It took more than four years for the county to study and revise the Upper Swift Creek Plan. What is your view of the new plan approved earlier this month?

Durfee: I am the person who put the revision of the Upper Swift Creek Plan on the table. The goal is to update the plan to meet our public service and facility needs, balancing residential and commercial with our environmental concerns. The recent vote on the plan is disappointing, and we should entertain that plan again.

Tubbs: The plan was to preserve the water quality of the reservoir that we all aspire to. I advocate an ongoing review of the plan with water quality monitoring and with adequate staff to enforce the standards. If we find that there are violators, they should repair the damage. It should be reviewed periodically and be reflective of the interests of the citizens.

Hastings: I want to protect water quality because I was a biology teacher, and I understand phosphate levels and am concerned about it. Supervisor Warren said during the board meeting that he hoped the board would return to the issue, but we have to consider the property rights of property owners. I have the understanding of water quality issues and will protect the reservoir.

Jones: Who on the board of supervisors doesn't see that they are causing the pollution of the Swift Creek Reservoir? We need to keep our drinking water clean, but I haven't read the new plan to offer an opinion of being against it. I'm still in the process of studying it.

Is there a recent rezoning that you and your opponents disagree on?

Tubbs: I'm not aware of any of those cases because I haven't talked to my opponents. I

was disappointed that the Branner Station rezoning was approved with less than a majority of the board's support. State law needs to change to prevent that.

Hastings: I haven't talked with my opponents. I hope the Branner Station development takes some pressure off development in southern Matoaca.

Jones: I haven't discussed the cases with my opponents, but if they agree with the current board's record on rezonings, then we disagree drastically. The board is being foolish on growth and rezoning issues.

Durfee: I was the executive director of the Responsible Growth Alliance of Chesterfield, which I founded. I have been speaking about rezonings, but my opponents haven't been visible and have not stepped up to the plate. You need to be involved, and it's unfortunate that they have not taken the time to do so.

Last year, the county said it needed \$1 billion to catch up to its road needs. Where do you propose that the funds come from?

Hastings: It's difficult to find the money when your annual budget is \$1 billion. The board has taken some band-aid steps. Without the state, funding roads will put too much burden on local taxpayers. We need to lean on our state legislators to come up with more money.

Jones: The state is instrumental in funding Chesterfield roads, and we should do our part. Just as it has been irresponsible in rezonings, the board has also been irresponsible in budgeting and spending. Common sense at the board level is lacking. If we cut unconstitutional and unnecessary spending from the budget, we would have money for roads and schools.

Durfee: We need to identify road funding sources. We are using CDAs, and the General Assembly has given authority to impose impact fees. The state has indicated it doesn't have funds for local road building, asking local governments to manage their residential growth. We need to prioritize our road needs.

Tubbs: The money from the state is simply not there. One piece of legislation proposed that all high-growth counties be responsible for their own road networks. I propose we reduce the county budget by 5 percent, which would generate about \$50 million. We could leverage that toward \$500 million in bonding capacity to build roads and still keep our AAA bond rating.

With the school system's budget being over half of county spending, should the board of supervisors veto a specific line item in the school system's budget?

Jones: The county board is spending money wastefully elsewhere to start cutting money from the school system. If we manage our budget with common sense, we won't need a line item veto. Schools are a necessity, but other things in the budget are not necessities.

Durfee: I believe the supervisors should not automatically have that authority to veto a line item, and their action should be based on solid information. The funding for the school budget comes from the supervisors, but they should collaborate.

Tubbs: The answer is no. I believe the school board would take the position that the county board does not have the statutory authority to do line item vetoes. The funding formula for the school system has been in place historically. The school board received \$641 million last year, which represents a 9 percent increase. If the citizens are dissatisfied with the decisions of their members, they can elect new school board members.

Hastings: No, the board of supervisors should not micromanage the school system. What was actually done was to reduce the school budget by the amount of the preschool program. The supervisors did a real disservice to the school board by moving the new middle school east. As supervisor, I will work closely with the Matoaca school board member.

The county wants to cap Commercial Development Authorities at \$75 million and

about one-half of that amount has already been allocated to Magnolia Green, the Watkins Centre and Centerpointe. Which other projects should be able to set up a CDA?

Durfee: We have to be careful not to exceed the cap because it could affect our AAA bond rating. We have a real need to expand our Meadowville Technology Park. We should look at providing funds for that project and prioritize our road needs throughout the county.

Tubbs: We need to investigate our projects and look at opportunities to identify all funding mechanisms for roads. While the county has set the cap at \$75 million, I would not be averse to looking at whether that cap should be raised.

Hastings: I would be supportive of the Meadowville and Cloverleaf Mall projects for economic development. We should be cautious about citizens in one area paying one property tax rate and others paying a different one because that leads to problems.

Jones: We should look at each project individually. We should make sure our school and road needs are addressed first and then look at other developments.

How do you think the expansion of Fort Lee will affect Chesterfield County?

Tubbs: With the possibility of 10,000 people coming to the area, we're going to have a tremendous need for housing, schools, better roads and other infrastructure. I have been meeting with the military for my company to address their need for natural gas. It's a real opportunity for economic prosperity for eastern Chesterfield.

Hastings: It will lead to a lot of growth in southern Chesterfield, particularly in the Ettrick area. It will help revitalize that area including Virginia State University. It will mean that we need to work more with Prince George County and Colonial Heights.

Jones: It will bring a lot of young men and

women to the area who will need housing, but the new subdivision home prices start in the upper \$200s, which many newcomers can't afford. The southern part of the district needs commercial and residential growth.

Durfee: Because of the location of Fort Lee, there's an opportunity for the impact to be positive, and I do think it will be positive for the county as a whole. We need to monitor the impact of any kind of growth.

Is the middle class being priced out of homeownership in Chesterfield?

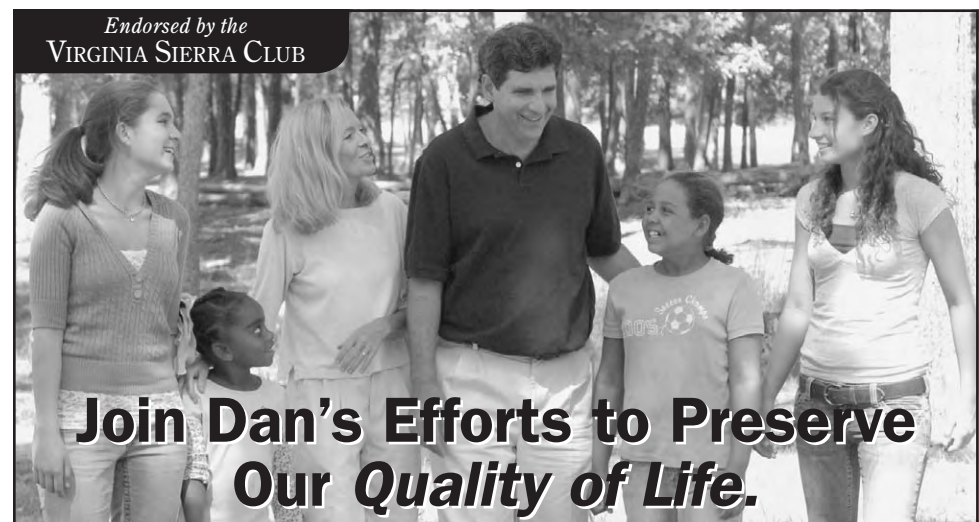
Hastings: The typical range for houses today in the county is \$200,000 to \$300,000. Houses that sell for less than that don't stay on the market for long. We're attracting people from all over the country, becoming more cosmopolitan. We're having a northern Virginia feeling, and that's driving the real estate market. We are pricing people out of the market. The cost of the lot I bought years ago is about the same as a proffer today.

Jones: Definitely. People who work at Wendy's can't afford a \$300,000 house. The county board has not acted responsibly or with common sense. If I'm elected, I'll listen to what the citizens have to say and address those needs.

Durfee: We need to be concerned about all kinds of housing - for low-income, middle-income or high-income families. The cost of housing today is getting out of control, and we need to provide affordable housing, mixed-use housing, so the residents can use the amenities no matter the price range.

Tubbs: Probably. One of my college-aged children wants to return to Chesterfield, and I'm concerned about her ability to buy a home. She may be living with us for awhile until she can buy a condominium. We need to rethink our planning so that we provide affordable housing so people of modest incomes are able to buy a home in Chesterfield County.

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Join Dan's Efforts to Preserve Our Quality of Life.

Dan Gecker knows how to protect quality of life. An expert at the national level, he specializes in the rehabilitation of historically significant buildings and urban revitalization outside of Chesterfield. His non-profit organization, the Chesterfield Conservancy, seeks to protect additional green space in the county. As Planning Commission Chairman, Dan proposed "Level-of-Service Standards" to prohibit new development when our schools are overcrowded or our roads are unsafe.

On October 10, 2007, the Board of Supervisors crossed the line. They denied the "Level-of-Service Standards" and voted to open up the entire Swift Creek watershed area for massive residential development.

Stop letting developers make the rules.

Vote for Dan Gecker, Independent for Supervisor

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