

Face to face: Public invited for informal meeting with all four Wood River mayoral candidates

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
March 18 2017 7:08 PM





WOOD RIVER - All four Wood River mayoral candidates were available to answer questions in an informal meeting hosted by the Wood River Public Library.

Wood River Public Library Assistant Director Jennifer Baugh said the event was held to allow people to meet each candidate in an informal fashion. She said the purpose of the meet and greet setting was to ensure each of the candidates had an equal opportunity to speak with his or her possible constituents. Outgoing Wood River Mayor Frank Akers is not seeking re-election, which leaves an "open field" for candidates Scott Miner, Scott Levan, Cheryl Maguire and Tom Kane.

Miner was named as the youngest candidate in the state to attain public office when he was elected to the Wood River City Council at 18. Now, at 22, he is looking to be the youngest mayor ever elected in Illinois. He said he is not doing it for the recognition, however. Miner believes his youth has brought new ideas to the table at a council level, and hopes to continue his view of new things to the city administration.

"My age gives me insight into new things," he said. "I'm not along with the status quo."

Miner said he prides himself on transparency and accessibility, saying he meets with people who both agree and disagree with his beliefs. He said he was mentored by Akers and the late Fred Ufert, and would like to continue that work if elected

Levan said he wants to make Wood River more appealing and healthy. He told members of the public he would work to clean derelict properties and hold property owners accountable. He said he would also work with business retention and making Wood River more environmentally sound.

"We have a bad reputation as a dirty grimey city because people think we're just refineries," he said.

If elected, Levan said he would work with the EPA to continue restoration efforts at former refinery sites.

Levan said he served two terms on the Wood River City Council, and would work to expand TIF districts in both the east side of town and the downtown area. He said the recent loss of Wood River hardware due to retirement was unavoidable, but would work to maintain a more friendly business environment there and create a cleaner city.

Maguire wanted to create a more appealing Wood River as well. She said she wanted to work with restoring economic development and reviving residential areas. She said, during her 16 years on the Wood River City Council, she spoke with developers from California who said the city was ripe for development with interstate, railroad and airport proximity.

More ambitiously, Maguire said she wanted to work with a collective of home renovators to possibly pool their resources and investing renovating homes across the city. She also said she would create an economic development team of business owners, real estate developers, landlords and other building owners.

When asked why she was running, Maguire said, "I've been on the council 16 years, and after Akers took office, he made it clear he was not going to seek reelection. I was asked to run by many people."

Tom Kane said he would "declare war on the drug dealers of Wood River." He described himself as a "blue collar candidate," having recently retired from work at the power plant. He also said he was endorsed by the Wood River Police Department, but this claim could not be verified at this time.

Kane also said he was the only candidate speaking with business owners downtown, promising to work with them as well as on the east side, the latter of which he referred to as "the flavor of the week." He said he was the only candidate meeting with downtown business owners regarding their concerns.

He said he has also spoken with business owners and law enforcement from other town, and vowed to find room in the budget for more officers, while also vowing not to raise taxes. He said he would ask large businesses on the east end such as Wal-Mart, saying he would "go all the way to Arkansas" to secure a grant for better law enforcement.

East Alton Wood River High School civics teacher Jesse Daniels came to the event and said he was pleased with the library's format, adding it was nice to see so many people taking part in the Democratic democratic process on a Saturday afternoon.

"Having four candidates in Wood River for mayor is rare," he said. "With Akers not running for re-election, it has really opened up the field."