

County Board Chairman nominates three new members to Metro-East Sanitation District

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EDWARDSVILLE — Longtime Madison County Board member Helen Hawkins is finally getting her wish — to become a member of the Metro-East Sanitation District Board and work to prevent flooding.

“This is the reason I got involved in politics in the first place,” Hawkins said. “To help alleviate flooding and to help people save their homes.”

Hawkins, who represents District 16 in Granite City, said she is thankful to County Board Chairman Kurt Prenzler for nominating her for the position. The County Board will vote tonight on her appointment along with two others, Charlie J. Brinza and Donald Sawicki, both of Granite City, to replace the three MESD board members who resigned earlier this week.

Prenzler said he chose Hawkins because of her experience with storm water and flooding issues in the American Bottoms.

“This is Helen’s passion,” Prenzler said. “I believe because of her experience and knowledge of the area and its residents she will do a great job. She always been there working for the taxpayers.”

Prenzler said he appreciates everything done by the former commissioners; however he was ready to appoint his own “team.” The MESD board consists of five members and Madison County selects three due to its higher assessed valuation than St. Clair County.

It has been Hawkins ongoing quest since she moved to area in the 1950s to resolve flooding and drainage problems in Nameoki and Granite City townships. She and her late husband soon discovered that homeowners in the Dobrey Slough neighborhood were deluged with storm water after heavy rains.

“I remember when they would use row boats to get around Pontoon Beach when it flooded,” Hawkins said. “We’ve come a long way since then and still have a ways to go.”

Hawkins helped lead the area to get the drainage it needed to prevent flooding, especially in the Pontoon Beach and Mitchell areas. She was even appointed by late Illinois Governor Richard B. Ogilvie to a committee to work on storm outlet plans in and around Horseshoe Lake and the American Bottoms, which is the lowest point in Madison County and where a majority of storm water runs before entering the Mississippi River.

“Besides Helen I do believe the other individuals I’ve picked will also add value to the board,” Prenzler said.

The MESD was founded in 1974 following the dissolution of the East Side Levee and Sanitary District by voters.

Brinza attended Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and holds a bachelor in arts in psychology from Quincy University. His work experience includes working at financial institutions as well as providing products for the industry.

Sawicki holds a bachelor's of science in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois. He's worked for defense contractors including Emerson Electric and McDonnell Aircraft and he currently does consulting with GoogleMaps, Javascript and other programming work.

Prenzler said Hawkins' replacement on the County Board would be named in June.