

Democracy 2019: Godfrey Trustee Candidate Ben Allen

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY – Godfrey Village Trustee Ben Allen was appointed by Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick to finish the term of slain Godfrey Trustee Eldon “Twirp” Williams last year.

He is running to retain that position during the April 2, 2019 election. Godfrey residents will be able to choose as many of three of six candidates currently running on their ballots. Allen said he has lived in the Alton-Godfrey area for 65 years, having established his law offices in Alton and serving as a Madison County Assistant State's Attorney. During his time in law, Allen has provided legal support to several area municipalities, including Hartford and East Alton, he said. He also said he worked with Mayor McCormick to work through the village's sewer sale, something he also said he offered to the City of Grafton.

“I hadn't had experience in legislative stuff,” Allen said. “I never ran for legislative office. The mayor approached me to fill the rest of Twirp's term, and I knew Twirp and his family for 60 years. Mrs. Williams supported me as the choice to fill the position. His term expired, so I am running for it. I'm not looking to make a career of it or anything. My age is sort of a term limit itself.”

Allen is notably the owner of the Loading Dock in Grafton, and was recently selected as one of Mayor McCormick's favorite candidates in the running. McCormick endorsed Allen in a letter to the editor piece sent to local media. Allen also said he supported the mayor in his efforts and has been friends with every Godfrey mayor since its founding less than 30 years ago.

A critic of that endorsement, Lynn Burnett, said Allen would work for Grafton's best interests instead of Godfrey's due to his business interest. She supports candidate Virginia Woulfe-Beile who has a strong opposition to the Lars Hoffman extension – a road, which would connect Godfrey Road to West Delmar (Route 3) after connecting to I-255. Woulfe-Beile said she believed that extension would take people from Godfrey's business district and divert them toward Grafton. Allen said that is not the case.

Allen said new rail jobs coming to Jerseyville, which could number as many as 20,000, could create a housing boom in Godfrey – as Godfrey has lower real estate taxes than Jersey County. He said Godfrey was in a place most nearby municipalities were not, saying the village's low taxes, limited-to-no debt and “millions in the bank” placed it in a world of opportunities. He said connecting Godfrey Road to Route 3 – the main business districts of Godfrey – would be beneficial for people.

Overall, Allen said Godfrey lacked a downtown district, as it is the product of suburban sprawl from Alton. He said the construction of a cultural center for the village would help establish such an area. He said he wanted to build such a center near the current village hall. It would contain government offices as well as cultural centers.

“We could put something like a theater in there,” Allen said. “Alton Little Theater is looking for a new home. We could do something like that here.”

He also said the development of Godfrey and the development of nearby areas like Grafton should work more like a compliment than a competition. He said Grafton did not have a lot of the opportunities Godfrey does, nor does it have the population. He said developing Grafton would also help Godfrey as each communities have something different to offer residents and visitors. He said he worked with the Alton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), which has a focus on building the entire region together.