

# Council Challengers Make Sales Pitch to Voters

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Greenville County Council candidates from left to right - Ken Matesevac, Frank Farmer, Curtis McGahhey, Kelly Long, Gary Collins, Ethan Jedziniak, John Langville, Steve Shaw.

Eight candidates for Greenville County Council participated in a forum this past Tuesday evening at the Hughes Main Library. The event, attended by about 100 voters, was sponsored by the Palmetto Conservative Fund.

Jeff Magg and former councilman Joe Dill served as moderators. Magg explained that all of the incumbents as well as the challengers had been invited to participate in the forum. Steve Shaw was the only incumbent to show up.

Ken Matesevac is challenging Shaw for the District 20 seat. Matesevac got into the race after Shaw had announced that he was going to run for the General Assembly but later decided to seek reelection to his seat on council. Since Matesevac had already announced, he decided to stay in the race.

Frank Farmer and Ethan Jedziniak are facing off against each other for the District 22 seat, which is being vacated by Stan Tzouvelekas, who is running for a seat in the South Carolina General Assembly.

Kelly Long wants the District 18 seat currently occupied by Mike Barnes. Gary Collins is challenging long term councilman and former council chairman Butch Kirven for Kirven's District 27 seat. Curt McGahhey is running to unseat incumbent Chris Harrison in District 21.

Rounding out the eight candidates who were present at the forum was John Langville, who is running for the District 24 seat, which is currently occupied by council vice-chair Liz Seman. Langville was the only Constitution Party candidate in attendance. All of the others are Republicans.

All six of the council incumbents who are up for reelection this year have challengers. No one is a shoo-in.

Although there were occasional variations to answers given, the candidates were in basic agreement most of the time.

Why are these individuals running for council. Farmer said that several of the councilmen were not easily accessible. He said that he would be. Long offered three reasons for her candidacy – over-taxation, over-development and fiscal irresponsibility.

Collins said, "I'm just fed up." He said that the county has sufficient tax revenue and should have top resources.

Langville said that the council leadership is not answering to the people. "It's time to remove incumbents," he said.

Dill asked when is it appropriate to raise or decrease taxes. Matesevac said that the county does not need more tax money and promised that he would vote to repeal last year's unprecedented tax increase. McGahhey wondered why bureaucrats were getting raises.

"We have the money and I am tired of these vultures just destroying my pocket at every turn," said Farmer.

Long said, "We're Republicans, our platform should not be to raise taxes" and that, if there ever is a need to raise taxes, to be transparent. Collins expressed irritation that county administrator Joe Kernell is making \$336,000 per year when the budget is not balanced and the essential facets of government are not being performed. Langville said that if a tax increase is ever needed, then go to the taxpayers and ask them.

The candidates were also asked about the practice of offering FILOT's (fee in lieu of taxes) to bring in new corporations. Dill, in asking this question, opined that they were originally designed to get companies to bring their headquarters to the county but that the practice has devolved.

Shaw echoed that sentiment. He said that they served their purpose to bring in new industry when the textile industry was dying out but that their time has now run out.

Langville said that the county needs to go back to taxation rather than FILOT's. Jedziniak pointed out that they are only for big business, not small ones like his law practice. He said that big businesses are given better treatment. Collins pointed out that Greenville has 228 FILOT's. He said that the county has low unemployment and that the county no longer needs the jobs that FILOT incentives might bring in.

Long offered perhaps the best quip of the night - "Quit selling out Greenville County like we're a cheap date." She said that big businesses need to pay their way.

Farmer said, "FILOT's are the government picking and choosing its winners."

When Magg asked whom to hold accountable for misuse of funds, Farmer responded that it is the council and the county officials who are to blame. "Clean house, that's why we're all here."

McGahhey said that Kernell is to blame and that he would go after him. Long also said that the responsibility falls on Kernell.

Jedziniak wants transparency. "Show me the receipts," he said. Langville said the leader of the council should bear some responsibility and that an independent audit is needed. Several of the candidates said that transparency was needed, as well as an audit.

The last question of the evening was asked by Republican activist Harrison Musselwhite, who said, "Thank you for standing up to remove the covenant breakers off of our county council. . . We have a great opportunity to take over county council with constitutional conservatives." He then asked the candidates to commit to removing from leadership the current chairman Dan Tripp and vice-chair Liz Seman, whom he described as "horrible uniparty globalists." All said that they would.