

Casino effects, zoning addressed at voter forum - Southeast Missourian

Written by Administrator
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Zoning questions and issues affecting the local economy dominated much of Tuesday night's League of Women Voters of Southeast Missouri voter forum.

Candidates for Cape Girardeau County Presiding Commissioner were asked if they would permit peripheral zoning as the Cape Girardeau City Council referred it to the commission. Democratic candidate Pat Wissman said he is not in favor of it

as it stands now. He said it is not fair and would hurt people, adding he would like to see a more "common sense" approach.

Republican candidate Clint Tracy said he was glad the resolution was passed by the council, because it leads to more discussion. He said he did not feel it was up to the commission to make the decision, but the commission did have an obligation to talk to residents affected by the plan.

Candidates were also asked if they supported a proposed quarry in the county. Tracy said it was not the commission's place to make that decision, but the commission should mediate a discussion and try and reach a compromise. Wissman said he did not know the effect of a quarry, and did not totally support the quarry, but he would like to see the land developed into a retirement community.

Presiding commissioner candidates also listed economic issues as the top concern for the county. Tracy said the county is in a strong fiscal position to recruit business to the area. Wissman said a casino, and the jobs it would bring to Cape Girardeau, would be a positive to the county.

In the race for the Missouri House of Representatives 159th District incumbent Republican Billy Pat Wright said job creation was the most pressing problem facing his district. He said while there was a state budget reserve to help fund job programs, officials were borrowing against it. Democratic challenger Bill Burlison agreed that jobs were important, but curtailing the debt was also critical. In the past 30 years, he said the national debt has increased "15-fold."

There were no questions asked of candidates for county recorder of deeds or candidate for the 157th House district, because only one candidate for each office participated in the forum. During their two-minute statement, however, they explained their qualifications and goals for the office.

Scott R. Clark, Republican candidate for recorder, said he had the education to successfully manage the office. He said it was an important position and he had the "meticulous mentality" to do the job. Clark will face Democratic incumbent Janet Robert in November. She did not participate in the forum.

Donna Lichtenegger, Republican candidate for the 157th House district, said she would like to bring jobs to the district. She said the area loses out to states with a more friendly tax structure. She said she supports the FairTax, but is open to other ideas. Lichtenegger will face Constitution Party candidate Jennifer Allie Friedrich in November. Friedrich did not participate in the forum.

No candidates in the 158th House district race participated in the forum. Candidates appearing on the November ballot are Libertarian candidate Robert Lee Roland and Republican Wayne Wallingford.

Casino discussion

The forum also featured a panel discussion on the possibility of a casino coming to Cape Girardeau.

Supporter Mark Linzotti said a casino would bring 450 new jobs and \$14 million in payroll to the city. Dr. Richard Martin, however, said casinos are reluctant to place locals in higher-end jobs, and most of the jobs going to local residents would be menial and pay lower wages.

The Rev. Roy Jones, a casino opponent, said the immediate effect of the casino on the downtown area would be good, but within a few years it would start to fade. He said the casino in Caruthersville, Mo., requested its property taxes be lowered because it had trouble making money, despite initial success.

Linzotti said the recommendation of the DREAM Initiative, an downtown revitalization effort to which Cape Girardeau belongs, was to anchor the district with an entertainment complex, and that included a casino. He said the future of downtown is in the casino.

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