

(Neb.)-Statements From Chadron City Council Candidates Fisher, Mapes and Gamby

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 11/05/2012 11:34 AM

Photo: City council candidate Paris Fisher (left) shares ideas at the political forum with fellow candidates incumbent Jim Mapes (center) and John Gamby (right). (Photo by KCSR-Roxie Graham-Marski)

(Information from KCSR's Chris Fankhauser the night of the Political Forum)

(Chadron)-Three candidates are running for two open spots on the City Council, with Bill Barth running unopposed for a different term. The candidates are Paris Fisher, Jim Mapes and John Gamby.

Fisher said both men would make very good councilmen. He thinks those here would do a good job of representing the city. He said representation is your responsibility. You need to show up and you need to participate, and he encourages people to ask a lot of questions today, and continue to ask on a continual basis. Fisher has a degree in business and economics from CSC. He said if he could live anywhere, he would still pick Chadron.

Mapes said he is a life-long area resident, including farming near Hay Springs. He now owns Henken's Equipment in Chadron. He also enjoys Chadron, and says it has a lot to offer with good people who take care of each other. He has been a member of the Chamber board, and member of the City Council over the last year.

Gamby served on the council for 20 years, and has been encouraged to get back on after he left. He feels his historical contributions could benefit since Donny Grantham will not be back on. He said he was still attending meetings even when not on the council. He was born and raised in Missouri, and he and his wife both attended the university there. However, they raised their children here in Chadron, and feels they are more successful than he is, due in part to the community.

What do you think makes you qualified?

Gamby: Probably experience as much as anything. In the beginning, there was a learning curve, but it doesn't stop, it keeps going. The council is in good hands now, but thinks he can help there. Also in business, had to make payroll. Doesn't set apart, as most have the same experience.

Mapes: Ask the same every meeting. Dealt with public most of his life. Likes to think in most situations can deal with different opinions and come together on agreement. Fairly conservative. Most of Western Nebraska is. We are all qualified to do this job. It is a big learning curve. Once you get past this, good common sense and listening to the public helps to do the job.

Fisher: Agreed with others, similar backgrounds. All will do a good job in serving. Availability, again who do you want on the council, has to do more with you and how you participate in process of city government. We are all very conservative people, we all have business backgrounds, which would qualify us to serve. You make us the best we can be.

Storm drainage project. Do you favor and would you support bonding?

Mapes: A lot of aspects to the project. Been on both sides, for and against. Feels it is something that has to be looked at. Some issues on the bottom end of the drain system. Does not want to raise taxes, and will not support if that is required. But what we will gain with our money spent, and the state improving the highway through town. Bond issue will happen. Still in the middle. Need more information before complete answer can be given.

Fisher: Looked at the pictures from engineers. Have collapsed drain in part of lower system. Will need to be dealt with. Various ways to finance that. Will cost a lot. Will close parts of Main, and will affect his business. Not looking forward to it. Could extend half cent sales tax now that hospital paid off. Was a wise use of money. Could do this project, but might limit

future projects that could be completed within the city. At present time, could not vote for bonding in present form. However, expanding project to take care of other issues and lump together that would be acceptable to citizens and expand city boundaries for bigger tax base, probably could support it. Just not there yet.

Gamby: In 20 years on council, developed, maybe wrongly, certain distrust for engineering firms. There always seemed to be problems. Appears they always come with Cadillac of ways to fix things. Thinks other alternatives available. However, have not seen plans yet, and did not realize pictures available for viewing. As for bonding, in a pretty poor position to ask for sales tax at this point. Just experienced one to keep kids warm, safe and dry, and that failed significantly. Could be kind of embarrassing trying to get this through. Need to take care of drains but could be done easier.

Other main issues in coming years?

Gamby: Yes, back in 90s, had a planner come from Omaha and develop plan. Looked good at the time and voted for it, but since then, think the new houses and other things have been slow to take place. It appears the high dollar houses are being built in the country, a long way from a fire plug for fire protection. Also have sewer system and good water system, yet houses being built away from city. Believes plan needs to be revisited. Maybe we missed the boat.

Mapes: Afraid Chadron's like a lot of cities in US. Infrastructure getting older. When constructed, town wasn't near the size, and have continued to add on. Big project that will take a lot of money. Sewer, drain systems, all need attention and have limited funding. State help will probably get less. Less and less money available. We will be responsible to do this on our own. Harder to do because everything is higher. Engineering costs more than he thinks projects should cost. Balancing to get best value for dollar is hard. Weigh each project. Can't pick one, all seem to need attention. Need and want input from public.

Fisher: Several issues will be coming before the citizens. Extension of Heartland Expressway. If it bypasses Chadron, will do what happened to Kimball. No one will come into town. Need to be active in planning. Make sure it comes into or as close to Chadron as possible to attract sales tax dollars, meals, overnight stays, encourage people to enjoy our community. Also have to make available to other businesses to come in and grow. Have opportunities going forward to bring in business to expand our community. Housing not increasing however.

Do you favor extending half cent sales tax beyond expiration? What plans?

Fisher: Great idea to extend. Probably the only way we would be able to pay for infrastructure improvements without extending tax requirements on citizenry. Over time, costs have increased. Tax paid by people who are in and come through community. Take care of infrastructure problems and future development. Projects can be paid for that there is no other funding right now. Issue will eventually come before the voters. Hope they consider extending that for infrastructure repair and improvements and advancements.

Mapes: Yes, favors the continuation. Believes sales tax is fairest tax we can have. Will tax when people have money to spend. Have done a lot of good things in Chadron with funding. Not adding a new tax, just continuing current tax. Main Street Project good example. Would not put burden on property owners. Just one of the things talked about. Other major projects that need tackled.

Gamby: Gamby not sure he agrees. When first authorized extra tax, the first project was the swimming pool. Stopped in next quarter after funding raised. Next project was ladder truck for firemen. Then for Hospital. He and Mary Horse wanted to do it the same way. Believes is a good way to do it, to have an end. Not to be voted out, but stopped when expired. Good to let it run its course, and when we need something else and want it strong enough to work for it, then we can have it.

City Attorney not needed in every meeting? Cut costs?

Gamby: He is relied on heavily. Good for him to be there. Handier when attorney was resident of Chadron, which would be a plus. Suspect its good to have him there in attendance for the meetings. Feels it is well spent. Current attorney doing good job, but doesn't like the mileage.

Mapes: Before being on the council, I agreed, but now hardly a meeting goes by they don't ask his opinion. If he is absent, they have questions for him he answers at next meeting. Would also like to find someone local, but part of city government.

Attorney should be there.

Fisher: Agree he isn't needed at every meeting. To have attorney billing whatever rate is, and being there for a presentation for boy scouts, he doesn't need to be there. Could save a lot of money and a lot of travel expenses if a packet is put together to give to him after council meetings. Feels there is a lot of redundancy in city government. Although very good police department in Chadron, also a good Sheriff's Office. Could save a lot of money combining all law enforcement in Dawes County under one roof. That saved money could be used for improvements.

Cat ordinance?

Mapes: Difficult Question. Have to follow lines with cats as much as dogs. Don't have an answer for that, but are working on it.

Gamby: Agree it's a tough question. Cats have a tendency not to belong to anybody. Suggested for neuter and release deal. Could be expensive. Probably more than ready to put forth. Main problem is feral cats. Something that is counter productive is people who feel sorry for them and feed them. Probably the one who is supposed to have the answer, but he doesn't.

Fisher: He doesn't see its in the works for the City, but probably is a question that needs addressed. People coming before council asking about cats. He has 7 cats, all spayed or neutered. All have shots. Part of being a responsible pet owner. If you capture a cat and fix it and get shots, its about \$100 per cat, and if you get 100 per year, its expensive. Just no money in budget for that. What about catching and euthanizing? Its not a problem for the council, but for the community.

How should City Manager and Council work together?

Gamby: Manager should run the City on day to day basis. Council there to give guidance and oversight. Not to run day to day operation. Council hires only City Manager and Clerk. Rest of hiring done by City Manager. If line crossed, its not a good deal. Council there for policy and guidance. Sometimes causes conflict, but pretty cut and dried by law.

Fisher: Can't see everything that is going on. Sometimes actions of City Manager effect citizens, but not council. If you aren't involved in the political process and don't make your concerns known, we don't know how it affects you. Sometimes they don't know to encourage them to go forward or to stop. It falls on individuals in the community to tell the Council about concerns. Sometimes act as cheerleaders, and sometimes to slow down.

Mapes: City Manager is day to day activity of City Hall. Operations manager, and he chooses direction, then guides everyone in that direction. He fields complaints and concerns. Council sets policy. They all talk to different segments of the community. City Manager works with council to come up with plans or solutions.

Conclusion

Gamby: Extend thanks for the forum. Feels he can handle the job, appreciates the support, and will have an open door policy. Covered some hot topics, but that's okay. We asked for it.

Mapes: Thanked everyone who helped organize and attended. Chadron should feel somewhat comfortable. Good group of people to choose from for council. Doesn't know if he can ever deal with cat issue correctly. Takes a lot of time for council. Need more input. Hard to spend someone else's money. Needs direction, can go either way. Public input helps make decisions.

Fisher: Thanked everyone for attending and for their support and involvement in political system in community. Hopes each will remember you can't just come sit in a chair every 4 years, and no matter who you vote for, you need to make your voices heard. Would be grateful to serve on council, and other candidates would do a very fine job. Your responsibility as to what kind of a city you want to live in. Your responsibility to make your voice be heard. We will do our best to represent you fairly. Become involved in all levels, including state. Vote on November 6. Make this a better community for all of us.