

Discharge a key issue in Southside election

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Three vying for two seats on district board

SAGLE -- A contested proposal to discharge treated wastewater into the Pend Oreille River could prove to be a pivotal issue when Southside Water and Sewer District residents head to the polls on Tuesday.

Voting takes place from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the district's maintenance shop, located at 1670 Lakeshore Drive. The election is open only to renters and landowners who live within the district's boundaries and who are registered to vote in Bonner County.

Qualified voters can register at the district shop on the day of the election. Election-day registrants must present photo identification and documentation which shows their physical address within the district (post office boxes do not qualify).

Those who own land inside the district but reside elsewhere will not be allowed to cast ballots, according to Ginny Hendren, the district's clerk.

Voters will see three names on their ballots -- Frank Duffy, John Lischak and Bruce Vogelsinger. There will also be two spaces for write-in candidates, but Hendren said nobody has filed declarations for write-in candidacy, which effectively nullifies any write-in votes that are cast.

The race was to have a fourth competitor, Marcus Ross. But Ross said on Friday he is no longer a candidate.

The two candidates with the most votes will win the two six-year seats on the district's board, said Hendren.

Tuesday's election comes at a critical juncture for the district. It is currently operating under a new sewer hookup moratorium because the existing treatment system is maxed out. District leaders decided last year that discharging wastewater into the river during winter months would allow the system to keep pace with demand and ease pressure on land-application sites.

The discharge proposal has drawn widespread criticism from residents and landowners who bristle at the thought of sewage mingling with water in the Pend Oreille. Idaho's Panhandle lakes and rivers commission has also come out against the proposal.

Others, however, do not take such a dim view of discharging. Some support it as a cost-effective and ultimately safe way of addressing the infrastructure shortfall.

But neither Duffy nor Lischak are among that crowd.

"I would rather see (additional) land acquisition or another alternative other than discharging," said Lischak, an inventory analyst for retailer Coldwater Creek.

Lischak, 32, said he was prompted to run because Southside is at a crossroads and the decisions that are being contemplated now will have lasting impacts on the district.

Lischak pledges to be a hands-on leader who is open to patrons' feedback. He said he's "intrigued" by the idea of consolidating regional sewer systems and points out many have expressed concern about the discharge plan when he was on the campaign trail.

"I haven't heard anyone in favor of annexation," Lischak added, referring to a proposal that Southside pipe waste across the river to the city of Sandpoint, which would likely result in annexation and higher taxes.

Duffy found a number of people in the district who don't seem to be worried about discharging, a view he hopes does not represent the majority of district residents.

"We have strong concerns. We don't want to see even treated sewage discharged into the river if it doesn't need to be," said Duffy, a 40-year-old director of sales for Price Meadows Inc., a company which does accounting for private investment funds.

Duffy does not see that much promise in annexation either.

"Costs are a concern for me," he said.

Duffy said he was motivated to enter the race partly because of the discharge issue, but also because he wanted to give something back to the community of which he is a part.

Vogelsinger, an incumbent who has been supportive of the discharge proposal, is out of town for the next few weeks and could not be reached for comment. Messages left at his home and at the district were not immediately returned on Friday.