

The Running Whistle

By Rhona Baron

Leavenworth has new candidates on the track toward public office and come November residents will get to vote in the general election about the future of our town. Even before that, the mayoral race will require a primary vote on August 1st to narrow the field of three candidates to two.

Our mayoral candidates are the incumbent, Carl Florea, a former Lutheran pastor, Rich Brinkman, a sociology professor at Wenatchee Valley College, and Becki Subido, an adjunct professor at WSU. This race promises to hold the community's attention as each candidate comes across as passionate about their positions and ideas for leading Leavenworth. In upcoming weeks, we hope to include more about the individuals running for office. And mark your calendars. A public mayoral candidate forum is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Monday, July 10 at the Fire Hall!

The City Council race is thought-provoking, as well. While incumbents Sharon Waters and Clint Strand are not up for re-election, five positions will appear on the ballot. Zeke Reister and Ann Hessburg will run unopposed. But Council position # 1 will see incumbent Marco Aurilio running against Travis McMaster. A vacated position in seat #7 will offer a race between political newcomers Shane Thayer and Polly McIntyre. That last seat at the table involves yours truly. After much encouragement I opted to run against Tibor Lak for position #4.

Running for office creates a bit of a quandary for me. While it's perfectly legal to write a column or host an opinion broadcast even while in office, The Whistle column and the team behind it pride ourselves in deeply researched, community driven content. We've decided that's not going to change. Having introduced you to the candidates and the timeline, The Whistle would turn your attention to City Hall.

We wonder if the community is aware of what's brewing with the Alpenglow project, now almost through the green lighting process. A hearing, this Friday, June 9th from 10-11am, is critical. Local developer Jordan McDevitt has submitted plans to initially develop a 70 lot parcel off Ski Hill, just up from the Pinegrass development, with plans to further develop three additional parcels over the next few years. The final outcome will pack as many as 130 new dwellings (including townhomes, duplexes, ADU's and single family homes) on that grassy hill where we've watched hawks hunt and where spring frogs have been singing for decades, perhaps centuries. Imagine Pinegrass on steroids.

Lilith Vespier, Community Development Services Director, has declared a notice of non-significance to all concerns that would stand in the way, although there is much to question. Traffic analysis was haphazardly done, ignoring weekend and festival traffic. The numbers are weak, basically indicating that traffic on Hwy 2 and Chumstick is already going to be heavy, so this development's impact really won't matter. A City water study shared last spring showed that the City "cannot meet its current peak hour

demand” with existing sources and facilities, let alone the demands of new developments like Alpenglow, especially during peak and fire season. Note that the dedicated Public Works Director Wachholder told the Council last month that sewage treatment is already at 85% capacity when tourists pack the town. That’s a red flag for the DOE.

Time to blow the Whistle! If the mayor, council and planning commission are so concerned about affordable housing, why is there NO plan to hold the developer accountable for reasonably priced and sized homes? And what guarantee do we have that even if smaller homes are built, they won’t be swiped up by folks using them as B&Bs and second homes? This is not the Leavenworth we envision. We object to kicking the can for infrastructure, traffic, environment and community housing down the road.

Kirvil Skinnerland, director of the newly formed Residents Coalition of Chelan County (RC3) has been hard at work reviewing the process for Alpenglow, “This is yet another example of why the City should not be approving new development until it knows exactly where we stand in our water and sewer infrastructure.” According to Skinnerland, “The capacity of the sewage treatment plant will be done in July. So the bottom line is that we don’t have adequate information on either water or sewer at this time.” Common sense dictates waiting until comprehensive and costly studies are completed before determinations of non significance are made.

This column is your Whistle call. More citizens attended the past two PC and Council meetings, and it made a difference! Show up and speak up. Your bright presence serves as the disinfecting sunlight that triggers accountability in shady places. We hope to see you there, Friday, June 9th from 10-11am.

Find all Whistle columns and more at LWhistle.com. Or just keep whistling. We’ll hear you.