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How 4 candidates stand on redevelopment, arts center, annexation

(15 reads)

By Debbie Carson, Staff Writer

TEMPLE TERRACE — Four candidates running for two open seats on the Temple Terrace City Council faced several questions regarding the fate of the city’s downtown redevelopment project, its related arts center, and even annexation.

Those candidates are incumbent Ron Govin, Mary Jane Neale, Ted Grevenkamp and David Penoyer. Govin is up for re-election while current councilman Frank Chillura has reached the end of his term limits.

**Mary Jane Neale**, an 18-year community volunteer, told the audience that she’s a “totally different kind of candidate.” She’s never sought an elected office before and has served on several boards only at the appointment of others.

**Ron Govin** has served four years on the City Council and the last couple years as the council’s point man during discussions with Ram/Pinnacle, the most recent developer team to walk away from the downtown project.

“I’ve worked as hard as I can for this city,” Govin said.

**Ted Grevenkamp**, an Army veteran and member of various community groups, said that he would “stand in your stead” if elected to council.

“You need to have a decision maker,” he said, adding that he is good at problem solving and making decisions.

**David Penoyer** is an engineer by trade who has a vision for the city that goes beyond lower taxes, better services and downtown redevelopment.

“I encourage you to ask me questions,” he said.

**Where they stand on Downtown Redevelopment**  
**David Penoyer:** “There are very few options,” he said. “We need to move forward with something that’s going to give us a sense of place.” He added that the city would not sell the property out to Wal-Mart or Lowe’s. “We’d take a bath on the price and that would be irresponsible to the taxpayers.”

**Ted Grevenkamp:** “I don’t know because we don’t actually have a plan,” he said, adding that the city needs to back off and look at the situation. He also said that the residents of Temple Terrace need to be brought back into the process. “We cannot simply shove forward.”

**Ron Govin:** Govin said he disagreed with Grevenkamp’s assessment, noting that 40 percent of the project is done. “We do have a plan,” he said. “We have worked diligently.” He added, “We’ve got to go forward and we need to do it as quickly as possible to be economically feasible for the city.”

**Mary Jane Neale:** “I think we had a plan in the beginning,” she said. “I think we need to go back to the original plan and we need to go back to the original vision.”

**Where they stand on being in the “real estate business”**  
Candidates were asked how they would get Temple Terrace out of the real estate business.

**Ted Grevenkamp:** He said that the only way Temple Terrace could get out of the business would be to sell the land and take a loss. He added that some residents he has spoken to while out campaigning have made that very suggestion. “I wouldn’t sell it now. We have to do better than that.”

**David Penoyer:** “We certainly don’t want to be developers.” He said that the city needs to have a planner-driven process for the downtown redevelopment project instead of a developer-driven process so the city can control what happens there.

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**Mary Jane Neale:** “We are in the real estate business and we need to solve that problem reasonably and with a plan.”

**Ron Govin:** “The city has always been in the real estate business and will always been in the real estate business because we have to buy and we have to monitor and we have to grow” to make sure the city can provide the services that the residents demand. “We’re only providing what is demanding.” As for the redevelopment project, he said that the city needs to have the right developer and the funding in place. “We were close and we’ll be closer soon.”

**Where they stand on the Community Arts and Education Center**

**Mary Jane Neale:** She said that she supports having an arts center because it would enrich the lives of the citizens. As far as being able to build and fund the center, Neale added, “I can’t tell you how we’re going to afford it until I know what we’re buying.” She said the city needs a plan for it and that the center could pay for itself.

**David Penoyer:** He said that he was surprised by the community’s support for the arts center and he also supports it. He added that the city should try to create a public-private partnership for the center, noting that “I don’t think we need to go out there on a limb by ourselves.” Penoyer also said that the center should be a green building.

**Ted Grevenkamp:** He said that the center is a good concept but that the city shouldn’t assume that it would build it. He also said that he wouldn’t support the center if it can’t pay for itself. “Our budget today can’t handle the library for heaven’s sake, can’t put books on the shelf.”

**Ron Govin:** He said he supports the center, noting that the city could then celebrate arts and culture much as it does athletics. He added that the center would give the city a place to hold events. “We have no building in Temple Terrace to accommodate you,” he said of the reason for holding the forum at the church.

**Where they stand on annexation**

**Ron Govin:** “If we want to control what’s on our edges and protect our city, sometimes we have to annex” to put perimeter areas under the city’s rules. He added that the city’s policy has been that annexation be approved only if it can pay for itself.

**Ted Grevenkamp:** He said he’s gone out and talked to residents about annexation and what it’s done for them. “So far all I’ve gotten is blank looks.” He said the city needs to do better at integrating the annexed areas. “We have two Temple Terraces today.”

**David Penoyer:** He said he agreed mostly with Govin, that annexation is fine to protect and control the city’s borders and that he would support it so long as the police and fire departments agree on it.

**Mary Jane Neale:** “We need to think about it,” she said, before deciding whether or not to annex. She added that the city needs to be mindful of what it is annexing and how services would be provided to those residents.

**Learn more about the candidates**

In the coming weeks, The Beacon will be profiling each of the four candidates in their own words. Be sure to keep an eye out for the profiles.

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