

TITLE---...Gentlemen, start your engines!!

“*Neighborhood Speak*”-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

The early indicators for the upcoming Mayor’s race shows two very strong candidates will be running for the open seat being vacated by Al Boro after twenty years. Gary Phillips and Greg Brockbank have each indicated they will run and the race promises to be a horse race requiring a boat-load of money and likely some thick skin. Others could enter, but these two candidates will be the odds-on favorites.

Phillips was on the San Rafael City Council for 12 years and chose not to run for re-election when his last term ended in 2007. He lives in North San Rafael and is well known in those neighborhoods. Previously he was a Planning Commissioner and a Dixie School Board member. Brockbank ran for council in 2007 after serving as an elected representative on the Marin College Board for 18 years. He has been involved in an array of liberal political groups and environmental organizations.

The political orientation of each candidate is quite different. Phillips is more a business representative, considered somewhat conservative. He is an accountant by trade and is the current CEO of the SR Chamber of Commerce. Brockbank is a card carrying progressive and environmentalist who also runs a law practice in San Rafael. Many believe he would like to bring a more activist orientation to the City Council.

Al Boro has already thrown his support behind Gary Phillips. Numerous people have said that Gary would continue many of the policies of Mayor Boro. For those who think San Rafael currently functions with a well run City Hall and who believe it is positive place to live, Gary could do well.

Brockbank, however, has tangled with Mayor Boro, who often runs the city council with his agenda in mind and where the input of others is not solicited or welcomed. Greg would likely set a different tone and make the city more neighborhood friendly and encourage greater citizen involvement. Many people believe SR is on a misdirected path and has been for the last 5-6 years.

After years of a downtown renaissance, many now see downtown as a precarious mess in danger of falling out of economic balance, dominated by nail saloons, massage studios, and other transient businesses. No recent issue maybe illustrates this better than the recent Target approval. Greg adamantly voted to oppose bringing another big box retailer to protect the remaining quality owner run local businesses. As CEO for the Chamber of Commerce, Gary strongly supported bringing Target to town. The many subtleties of this issue reflect their strong differences.

Voters will likely shake out with these two candidates in this way: If people think SR is currently running on a strong foundation in which local businesses will easily snap back when the economy rebounds and they like what they see when they look around SR, they likely will vote for Phillips.

If people feel the city is no longer in touch with its residents, is

lost in the forest and strongly dislike what they see, they could

easily select Brockbank. The overall feeling of dissatisfaction has also been driven by the fact that the Mayor has been perceived as shut off from feedback, having no patience with the public or speakers at city council meetings who might disagree with him.

Overall, Phillips is a smart business guy whose relationships with the downtown business movers and shakers will likely serve him well. He is considered a moderate politically, one who works to build consensus with his constituents. One soft spot could be his support out in the neighborhoods. During his 12 year stint as a council member, there is not a lot of compelling evidence that Gary reached out to learn or understand what things neighborhoods had on their agendas. The council during that period really had an exclusive focus on building up downtown with little discretionary time for neighborhoods.

Brockbank has been an activist, environmentalist and progressive liberal for virtually all of his political life. He is on more boards and commissions than probably all the other council members combined. When the sun sets in the horizon, you can likely find Greg attending some City or community meeting. For a council position that pays \$400 per month, the residents get a level of commitment that is indeed impressive. Politics is Greg's hobby and he's normally fully engaged, no matter what the issue.

So, official paperwork need not be filed until mid August for the November Mayors election, so clearly someone else could jump in. But I am not sure with Phillips and Brockbank in the race, any one serious will jump in who has anything similar to these two track records. It would be nice for a positive campaign to be run, but seems like that is increasingly rare in today's election environments.

One issue not likely to be voluntarily discussed by either candidate is the whole issue of unfunded pensions. It is affecting every aspect of governance, service delivery and public safety. However this is not a sexy discussion topic and the solutions are potentially monumental and would likely put public union support for either candidate at risk. And San Rafael's pension situation among the worst in Marin County.

So read, listen and be involved as the campaign takes hold!

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