

# THE DAILY TIMES

FARMINGTON NEW MEXICO

## Council candidates highlight similar views during forum

By James Monteleone The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — Voters who attended Tuesday's candidate forum hoping to learn how City Council candidates differ in opinion may have struggled identifying which candidate to support.

Rather than emphasizing differences in opinion on City Council priorities, the four candidates offered similar viewpoints on all of the city issues raised during the two-hour community forum.

Candidates Gayla McCulloch, a business owner and former state Republican Party leader, and Leigh Black Irvin, a private investigator and former FBI agent, are both running for the central Farmington District 3 counsel seat being vacated by George Sharpe.

For election to the north Farmington District 4 council seat, Bob Moon, an oil and gas equipment salesman and local pastor, is challenging incumbent Jason Sandel, an oil and gas service company vice president.

Addressing the question of whether raising the gross receipts tax should be considered to shore up lost city revenues, all four candidates emphasized taxes need to remain low to support business in the community.

"I don't know if at this point in time I'd be willing to do that," Moon said of increased taxes.

Utilizing volunteer work within the community

could be an option to reduce city costs and afford to keep taxes down.

Sandel said he has opposed three attempts to raise city sales taxes by the Council and will continue to fight increases.

"We must keep our taxes low if we're going to be a business friendly community. It is imperative that we are more attractive than other communities throughout the state of New Mexico and one of the ways we do that is by having one of the lower tax rates," Sandel said.

McCulloch in a brief answer gave an emphatic "no" to any suggestion of added gross receipts taxes.

Irvin agreed, even proposing the idea of lowering taxes by a fraction of a percent to see if the lower tax rate could spark increased spending among a weak local economy.

"We cannot be raising taxes especially during these hard times," Irvin said. "People are having a hard enough time."

The City Council candidates also voiced a collective opinion supporting strong legal action against the state if a pending proposal to require carbon emission cuts 25 percent below 1990 levels in 10 years is enacted by the Environmental Improvement Board in Santa Fe.

Three of the four candidates make at least part of their living from the oil and gas industry, which would be dramatically affected by such regulation.

Other issues agreed upon by Council candidates Tuesday included the need to make a longterm investment in Farmington's downtown district, an

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