

So, You Think You Can Lead

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – June 3, 2012

It's encouraging so many candidates qualified to run for local positions in the upcoming primary elections. These days, nearly everyone has all the answers, until you press them to put those great ideas into practice. Then, the excuses start.

"No, I wouldn't want to get involved in all of that."

That's why it's great to see 14 fellow citizens step forward to vie for three open County Commission seats and the Chairmanship of the Board of Commissioners. To each of these individuals – as well as candidates for other county and state posts – thank you sincerely for your willingness to serve. (As the spouse of a former elected official, I know very well the depth of commitment such service requires.)

As a resident of District 5, I am especially grateful to have six candidates seeking a seat to represent me on the county commission. These are critical times for our county. And, because this district encompasses two of the county's largest municipalities in Covington and Porterdale, the District 5 seat is pivotal in fostering the intergovernmental collaboration needed to bring our county back to prosperity.

As a voter and citizen who cares about the future of Newton County, I'll pass along my expectations for the right candidate.

First, to sell me on your professionalism and leadership abilities, prove it by how you run your campaign. In the last municipal election, five of six candidates for contested mayor and council seats in Covington were fined by the Georgia State Ethics Commission for not complying with campaign finance disclosure laws. I don't believe these individuals did anything unethical or deliberately deceitful. And, I know state ethics laws can be confusing. But, if elected, everything you do as a public official is governed by state laws that are every bit as confusing. I don't expect you to know or understand it all, but I expect you to show due diligence and ask questions until you are sure you have it right. When I thanked Lamar Brown last November, as the only Covington candidate to comply fully with the law, he assured me it was no big deal. All you have to do, he said, is take the time to read and then follow the law. So, candidates, please show us your professionalism by doing the same.

Second, don't tell us what you won't do if elected. (You know, it has to do with that "T" word everyone loves to hate.) That's all fine and good, if you're not going to raise my taxes. But, tell me what you ARE going to do. Imagine going on a job interview and spending the entire time telling your would-be employer all the things you are not going to do if hired. The idea is to

show the interviewer what you can do. The difference you will make. The value you will create. So, tell us that. What is your vision for Newton County? What measures success in your view? What actions will you take or advocate to bring about that success?

By the way, while your vision matters, it's not the only one. Like every qualified local government in Georgia, Newton County has a comprehensive plan filed with the State Department of Community Affairs. That plan, last updated in 2008, includes a "Community Agenda" representing our county's vision and plans for the future, transcending any one set of commissioners. As the DCA guidelines state:

"The purpose of the Community Agenda is to lay out a road map for the community's future, developed through a very public process of involving community leaders and stakeholders in making key decisions about the future of the community.

"The Community Agenda is intended to generate local pride and enthusiasm about the future of the community, thereby making citizens wish to ensure that the plan is implemented."

Sadly, I see too little evidence our elected officials understand their role as torch bearers and agents of action to realize the hopes and dreams of an entire community -- rather than as a launching point for narrow interests of a particular party or circle of friends.

Prove to me you are someone I can trust to bring due diligence and professionalism to both running for and holding office. Show me you have a clear vision and plan of action to make our county prosperous within the framework of a shared community agenda, and I will welcome you with deep gratitude and steadfast support as my District 5 Commissioner.