

NORTHEAST TARRANT MARCH 1, 2016 9:49 AM

Westlake mayor, two at-large seats are on the ballot

HIGHLIGHTS

Mayor, two at-large Council seats are expiring

Two challengers and three incumbents are running

The two-year term positions will be on May 7 ballot

BY MARK DAVID SMITH

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WESTLAKE — Five Westlake residents, including three incumbents, will vie for three expiring seats on Westlake Town Council.

The office of mayor and two at-large Town Council seats, which all have two-year terms, are expiring and will be on the May 7 election ballot.

Here are the candidates and their platforms:

MAYOR

Laura Wheat, incumbent, 58, said she's both proud of what the town of Westlake has accomplished since she was elected in 2008 and "equally excited and energized by what's ahead."

"One need only drive through Westlake to see that change is the air," Wheat said. "Although change is never easy, it is often inevitable, especially when you don't own the land. As mayor, I will remain laser focused on continuing to balance our Town's growth with our collective vision to remain an oasis of natural beauty, distinctive development and quality of life amenities amidst an ever-expanding urban landscape."

Wheat, a former attorney and current small business owner, said that as mayor, she's become well-versed in charter schools, specifically Westlake Academy, Texas' only municipally-owned charter school and "Westlake's largest asset." She's developed working relationships with town staff, Council and academy administration.

"Working together, we have created the Westlake of today and are well positioned for the Westlake of tomorrow," she said, pointing to the newly revised Comprehensive Plan, commercial development along Texas 114 and more than 10 miles of publicly accessible walking and biking trails.

Colin Stevenson, 53, is challenging Wheat. He said he is running on four key priorities: Sensible growth, revitalizing Westlake Academy, transparency and town governance and fiscal responsibility.

"First, sensible growth is a development approach that seeks to preserve the culture and 'rural feel' that defines Westlake and doesn't overburden our infrastructure and school," Stevenson said. "Second, revitalizing Westlake Academy through professional oversight and an improved Board of Trustees structure that enhances accountability, while remaining focused on the Academy's mission to deliver a distinctively international and unique educational experience."

Stevenson, a CPA, said that with transparency and town governance, he wants to ensure the town government seeks and accurately represents residents' views and priorities.

And in his fourth key point, Stevenson said that fiscal responsibility is a priority for him, and it ought to be "demonstrated through the prudent management of our tax revenues and resources and elimination of wasteful expenditures."

TOWN COUNCIL

Incumbent **Michael Barrett**, 49, called his four years on Council and a trustee of Westlake Academy an "honor."

"If given the opportunity by fellow residents to continue my service, I will maintain the same high level of responsible and ethical stewardship of Westlake's assets and resources," Barrett said. "I have worked with fellow residents and Town Council members to achieve and protect the status that Westlake has as an exemplar of responsible, planned, sensible growth and development, a place that keeps attracting people who want the best for themselves and their families."

He said Westlake remains a highly sought-after community, and "the town needs to be discerning and evaluate the prospects of developers and businesses with a long-term, broad vision as to what is right for Westlake now and in the future."

Barrett, senior managing director of financial services for GE Capital, said he can use his more than 25 years of successful business experience to continue to help the town.



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"I know the importance of keeping true to a solid vision and strong values while executing a strategy for responsible growth and development," he said. " My dedication to the town of Westlake, and educational leadership, transparent representation and attention to residents' concerns remain my top priorities."

Incumbent **Alesa Belvedere**, 52, has been on Council since 2012 and wants to use her real estate experience to help Westlake continue to progress.

"I understand firsthand how every community directly contributes to local, state and national economies," Belvedere said. "It is critical that our city/town governments foster excellence in education, stable development and a strong sense of community."

Belvedere said she is dedicated to serving the residents and stakeholders of Westlake, and is "committed to ensure we maintain a proper balance of development opportunities which enhance revenues and ensure the continued success of our municipally-owned Westlake Academy."

"Endeavoring always to protect the beautiful open spaces we have come to love and appreciate," she said. "Ultimately, my vision is that Westlake would be a community that people passionately call home, highly desire to do business in and our children look forward to returning to."

Sean Kilbride, who ran for Town Council last year, said he has three main focus areas in his platform, including revising the town thoroughfare plan, making changes at Westlake Academy and increasing the local government's transparency.

"I would like to work with federal, state and local officials to improve existing traffic arteries," such as Texas 170, 114 and U.S. 377, Kilbride said. "This will ensure that Westlake can be the financial/executive center we plan to be while maintaining our town's beauty and family environment."

Kilbride, 38, an independent consultant, said he wants to see a, oversight change of Westlake Academy "to address the issues that led to a loss of national ranking, thereby improving the academic performance and reputation of the school."

He wants to "make Westlake great again" by increasing the local government's transparency, citing concerns over the town's connection to United Development Funding, which was recently raided by the FBI and was accused of operating a Ponzi-like scheme.

"Our town government needs to be forthright with the residents in addressing how we are protecting the town financially and ensuring that Entrada will be complete," Kilbride said.



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