



Parrott

Auditor

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ventures into government work began on his 9th birthday in 1963, the same date and year President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. "It's almost 60 years ago," Parrott said. "You know, I'm tired of it. I just am. It has gone a direction I didn't ever think it would go, but it has.

And it's time for somebody else to handle these issues, to help solve the problems, to advise the board and work with the other people, the other elected officials."

According to Iowa Code, if the board of supervisors decide to appoint another person to the role of the county auditor, it must be within 40 days after the vacancy occurs, which would be approximately early to mid-February.

The appointment will last until the next general election.

If supervisors decide an appointment is the best option, then a notice must be published stating the board intends to fill the vacancy. However, Iowa Code states voters in Jasper County have the right to file a petition requiring the vacancy be filled by a special election.

Iowa Code also allows Jasper

County voters to file a petition requesting a special election within the first 14 days an appointment is made. Petitions will be valid if signed by eligible voters of the county equal in number to at least 10 percent of the votes cast in this coming general election for governor.

Voters who sign a petition must include a signature, their address and the date.

Candidates

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Democratic candidates Bev Price and Pam Olson both listed economic development as their top priority. Republican incumbent Brandon Talsma ranked economic development as his third highest priority for the county, with the No. 1 and No. 2 spots secured by infrastructure and law enforcement.

The increased tax valuations from economic development opportunities, Price said, are going to drive all the programs and funding in Jasper County. Without it the burden falls on taxpayers to provide all the funding for services. Continuing to work on existing and new projects will be critical, she said.

If the county pursues economic development properly, Olson said it could bring a lot of money into the area and therefore provide a lot more services. Both Olson and Price said public schools will play a major part in economic development. Schools make people want to raise their families in Jasper County.

"If they have a good school, if they have things to do, places to work — that helps all of us in the long run," Olson said.

Economic development is a major driver, Talsma said, and is always something that needs to be focused on. Over the past few years and even before Talsma took office, he said the county has always done an extremely good job partnering with the other communities when it comes economic development.

Beck's Hybrids, Janco Industries Inc. and Co-Line Manufacturing were some of the prime examples listed by Talsma. The sitting supervisor also said another entity is coming to Jasper County in the near future, something that the Newton City Council is also aware of. The county has to continue to grow, he said.

"But we have to grow in

a way that we don't lose who we are," Talsma said, pointing to the county's rural identity. "Especially those who live in unincorporated territories, those who come from agriculture. We don't want to be the next Ankeny, the next Altoona, the next Waukee."

In order to meet those economic development needs, the county may have to take a risk and bond for some projects. Candidates were asked their position on the use of bonding for economic development. Although noting it was a complicated topic, Talsma said it depends on a case by case basis.

Jasper County has to do its due diligence when considering whether to bond for a large project. Talsma said a supervisor has to weigh the benefits to residents and if it feasible with the budget; it should be looked at with strict scrutiny. Price said bonding has its place and is even required for a lot of projects.

"If we're going to do any economic development, there's going to be bonding associated with some of those projects," Price said. "But you do have to weigh the risk and reward. Honestly, if we could get a comprehensive plan together that has some meat to it ... we can set our goals so we know what we want."

The county does have a comprehensive plan, which Price acknowledged, but she argued it does not have specific plans. With a detailed plan, bonding can make sense and have staff work toward that goal. She agreed with Talsma, every project is different. But the county should have a way to repay that bond.

Bonding for projects is not something the county has done a lot of in the past, Price claimed, but there have been more projects as late. She hopes the county can work on more of those. Olson agreed with Talsma and Price. It all depends on the project, what it could bring to the county and what assur-

ances there are.

Olson said the question would be better if it was asked about a specific project. Later, the moderator gave them a specific project: the Legacy Plaza development and the accompanying reinvestment district. The moderator asked if candidates support bonding for the Legacy Plaza project to move forward.

The reinvestment district would provide \$14 million funds over 20 years. The revenue stream from new sales and hotel/motel taxes would provide those funds.

Talsma anticipated this question would come up. If there is a benefit to the county without passing the debt to taxpayers through the debt service levy, then yes Talsma would support bonding. The project seems realistic and the county did have its municipal advisor review it, and he's confident in the numbers.

"Really what it's going to come down to of whether I can support it all the way or not is what kind of assurances can we build into the agreement with DMACC, the developer, City of Newton — all the entities involved — to ensure if it's underperforming ... what are the other ways we can collect money," Talsma said.

Meaning he did not want taxpayers to take on debt. Price said it is going to take negotiations before committing to a bond. But the developer is not going to be able to raise all of the money for the rental housing and hotel projects at Legacy Plaza. It will take investment from local governments.

"It's important and that project is important, so hopefully we can get that worked out so we can move forward with all the stakeholders," Price said.

Olson recalled sitting in the board of supervisors meetings where this topic was discussed in-depth. To her, it would be a great project for the



Christopher Braunschweig/Jasper County Tribune

From left: Jasper County supervisors candidates Brandon Talsma, Bev Price and Pam Olson speak on stage during a joint forum organized by the Democratic and Republican party chairpersons on Oct. 15 at the Newton Community Theatre.

county to be involved with. But Olson said the county needs some kind of guarantee built in to the agreement, referencing Talsma's earlier statements.

"We want to make sure if it isn't performing like they think it should perform, we as citizens aren't going to fall back to having to be able to pay for this," she said.

A FIVE-MEMBER BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

While the three candidates found common ground on the issue of economic development, the question of whether the board of supervisors should expand to five seats instead of three did offer a little more variety. Price said a three-member board works but there are restraints and challenges.

"To have meaningful conversations about any projects without taking any action, they can't talk to each other right now. It's nearly impossible," Price said. "I honestly believe we can take the same money we have right now or slightly more and split that over five supervisors instead of three."

With five supervisors on the board, the work can be spread out, Price added, and it would lead to better discussions. Olson said she would support a five-member board. Members would have to come from specific districts and there would be an at-large position. Olson said the five-person lineup would help.

"I think more citizens

would get their voices in, I think it would lead to better discussions," Olson said, echoing Price's sentiments about funding for the board members. "And I believe that we could take the money we take with the three supervisors and split it among five and still come out OK."

Talsma differed from both Price and Olson by saying that decision can be left to the citizens of Jasper County, noting there is a process in place in Iowa Code that allows people to petition the current board to increase its membership to five. The specific Iowa Code is 331.203 under "Membership increased — vote."

He added, "I would leave that decision to them (citizens) and not for the board to make."

HANDLING PROPERTY TAX INCREASES

When asked how the county should handle property tax increases, Olson said it is a tough question to answer. She questioned if the increase would come from an increased tax levy or increased property valuations. The value of a property can increase but the levy can stay the same, she said.

"At which time your taxes are going to go up, so that depends on what you're really referring to," Olson said. "Are you referring to your tax levies? Or are you talking to your property values?"

Talsma said the county should handle property tax increases with hon-

esty and transparency, "the same way we've been doing for the past four years." If supervisors are going to raise property taxes, he said they have to have enough honesty and integrity to be upfront about it.

"It shouldn't be done arbitrarily through valuation increases and leaving the levy rates the same," Talsma said. "Obviously, we fought the last three years ... In the 2019-2020 budget, the county collected \$16,190,000 in property tax dollars. In 2022-2023, the current fiscal year, we collected \$16,483,000."

Many people blame the county for their higher property taxes, Price said. But she noted there are other agencies whose levies factor into that amount. She pointed to the county's recently added feature on Beacon to look at the distribution of property taxes, which could help citizens understand the process better.

Ultimately, Price hopes the county doesn't have to increase the levy.

"That's not the goal," she said. "The goal is for valuations to go up. But just because they go up doesn't mean you spend everything that's there either. We can drop the levy but it takes work ... We need to continue to do transparency and encourage the taxing bodies to do the same thing."

Visit www.newtondailynews.com to read the full coverage of the forum.

Contact Christopher Braunschweig at 641-792-3121 ext 560 or cbraunschweig@newtondailynews.com

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Please join us in celebrating Bertha (Zylstra) Talsma's 90th birthday on October 22 with an open house from 2:00 - 5:00 PM at I-80 Farms, 8647 Hwy F48 W, Colfax. If unable to attend, cards may be mailed to 304 E. 4th St. N., Newton, IA 50208. Bert turns 90 on October 18th. (NO PRESENTS, PLEASE)

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