

Text from Keller Citizen article, April 25

Four candidates are vying for Place 2 on the Keller City Council in the May 10 election.

John Baker

John Baker, 57, an airline pilot who has lived in Keller for about 20 years, is a past chairman of the Keller Public Arts Board and past member of the Keller Economic Development Board.

"I was asked by a lot of people prior to the election to run," Baker said. "Then specifically, after I saw the way the council handled the Clean Fleet Vehicle Policy, I decided enough was enough."

His time on the arts board was a chance to develop a vision and set it in motion. He worked with city staff, sponsors and other volunteers on the board to help create the program from scratch.

"I think I'm experienced at bringing people together," he said. "Taking input on a project, developing a course of action, and then executing it. We did that on the Public Arts Board for five years."

Experience on both boards let him work with staff on budget issues, he said.

"I think quality economic development is one of the most important, if for no other reason than to provide funding for the infrastructure that this council has already committed us to," he said, citing the library renovation, new fire station and ongoing drainage projects.

Baker said the council needs to be open to all of the citizens and constituencies, developers, neighborhoods and staff. "By taking that input and coming to a balanced solution, that provides for a quality development of the city," he said.

"I really think we need to change the direction of Keller," Baker said. "Many times in the past, a year or so, it has become way too negative and has effectively closed down input from many of the constituents that have a right to have their viewpoints listened to by the council. So I would work to open communications, and provide a responsive, respectful, balanced council."

Mark Harness

Mark Harness, church administrator at Mt. Gilead Baptist Church, is seeking re-election to see through projects the council has started.

"Infrastructure needs to be a top priority; that's the primary reason," he said.

Harness, 47, has lived in Keller for more than 18 years.

He said among the council's recent accomplishments are the groundbreaking for Fire Station No. 4, expected in a couple of weeks; voter approval of a \$4 million library expansion; doubling the street maintenance funding in the past two years to \$2.3 million; and reducing the property tax rate in 2006 and maintaining it for 2007. Harness also serves as chairman of the Stormwater Drainage Task Force, which prioritizes and oversees ongoing drainage improvements – many sparked by floods last summer.

He said one thing that makes him the best candidate is that he is sensitive to the voters' opinions. "I feel like I listen to the citizens, and I do the best I can to serve them," he said.

Paying for necessary projects is a major issue facing the city, Harness said. "We need to have some bond elections in the next couple of years for parks and recreation and street maintenance," he said. "I'm pretty certain there will be a stormwater maintenance bond proposal coming up. At least two of the bond elections are likely in November, he said.

If Marshall Ridge, planned to include 900 single-family homes in northeast Keller is built out, he said, another fire station will be needed.

Having a new assistant city manager whose role includes economic development will help in that area, he said.

As for the library, he said he wants to ensure the city gets the most for its money.

Harness, in his first term on the council, said patience has been a virtue. "The thing I learned was that city government, actually any government, getting to the end takes a lot longer than I anticipated."

Kevin Jerome

Kevin Jerome, a private investor, has governmental experience from a variety of roles.

Jerome, 41, has lived in Keller for more than five years.

He served on the city council in Maumelle, Ark., and started Louisiana's first archives and records management system as a department head in one of that state's parishes.

He also worked as a newspaper reporter in Louisiana covering, among other things, city council meetings.

The desire to run for office in Keller came from his role in opposing a multi-use development in Town Center.

"I was part of the petition drive over the Keller Station apartment issue in the fall," Jerome said. "We were just kind of upset with the buildout in Keller and how it's going.

We think we have more than enough residential in Town Center and we'd like to see some quality development in Town Center."

He said that for him, economic development is the most important issue. "Everything else is a side issue because the buildout will determine Keller's future more than anything else."

He said he sees the city welcome any and all development projects, but to ensure quality in the long term they must be carefully considered. He said that during his previous council service, he voted against good projects because they weren't the best.

"Developers come and go," he said. "Once it's built, it's there and we have to live with it."

What makes him the best candidate is that he said he would vote how citizens would if they were on the council.

"I'm running basically because I feel I have a good sense of what the people of Keller want, through the petition drive," he said.

Scott Zang

Scott Zang, online sales manager for a Fort Worth firm, said the need for more accountability in city government prompted him to run for the council. "I have a passion for our city, and the place that I live and raise my family," he said.

Zang, 34, has lived in Keller for five years.

He said he believes he can represent citizens best because he has much in common with most of them. He moved his family to Keller because of the school district and the small-town atmosphere, he said.

His work experience includes maintaining budgets and being held accountable for them – much like the council is.

A unique aspect he brings is his 17-year involvement with the American Legion Boys State program, which teaches high school juniors about government and the political process, he said. "Through that experience in teaching young men about our political system and the government, and their structure and how they work, I believe that gives me a very unique experience over some of the other candidates."

He said among pressing issues is traffic on FM 1709, U.S. 377 and North Tarrant Parkway.

"I believe we can work with state engineers to develop better plans where we're not putting people out of their homes and business owners out of their businesses," he said.

As for economic development, he said he would like to see the city make it easier for businesses to relocate here, through the use of tax incentives for startups and tax breaks for franchises.

Zang said another concern is retaining Keller's unique character. "We can look at our sister cities, but we don't need to mimic or copy them," he said.

He cited public art as another hot issue. He said he does not support using taxpayer money to purchase it. However, as an artist himself, he said he does support alternative funding, including cell tower leases and possibly some of the royalties from gas drilling on city land.

"I love art as much as the next person, probably a little bit more," he said.

He vows to practice fiscal responsibility and accountability, he said, challenging wasteful spending to maintain the city tax rate.

There should be more than one choice on important issues, he said, such as when last November's library bond election featured more than simply a yes or no vote. He said the same approach should have been applied to a vote like approval of the QuikTrip gas station on Davis Boulevard.

"Was the lot across from Hidden Lakes, was that the only plot of land along Davis?" he asked. "I believe if we look a little harder: no, it was not the only plot of land."