

Sartain announces Raleigh council run

Second openly gay city council candidate in state this year

by Matt Comer · Q-Notes staff

Another openly gay man has announced his intention to run for a city council office in North Carolina. Lee Sartain, a Charlotte native and N.C. State University alumnus, made the announcement in early June. He's running to fill one of two at-large seats on the Raleigh City Council.

In a telephone interview with *Q-Notes*, Sartain, 28, said his primary campaign issue



Lee Sartain is running for an at-large seat on the Raleigh City Council.

will focus on economic development. He wants to create a "Raleigh Innovation and Technology Zone."

"It's trying to basically take pre-existing technological space and doing a more concentrated effort around creating the [Research Triangle Park] of 2009 in downtown Raleigh."

He says such a "tech zone" — what he calls a "downtown renaissance" — would both mirror and complement the success of the Research Park.

Sartain also wants to focus on building more comprehensive public transportation.

"The difference between Charlotte and Raleigh is that our regional transportation is split between three counties," he said. "There has not been any major success getting the commuter rail up and running. If they can't come up with a reasonable plan, Raleigh

needs to do it on its own."

Neighborhood development and several other local government issues round out Sartain's campaign focuses.

Sartain will be the second openly gay man running for a city council seat in this election season. Owen Sutkowski announced his candidacy for Charlotte City Council in late May. Mark Kleinschmidt, currently a member of the Chapel Hill Town Council, is also running for mayor there.

But Sartain wants to be known for more than his sexual orientation.

"I'm not particularly keen on being called the 'gay candidate,'" Lee Sartain, a 2009 city council candidate in Raleigh, told *Q-Notes*.

In today's time, Sartain said, gay and lesbian people actually have a chance to run for office and make a difference on a range of issues other than those pertaining to the LGBT community.

"One of the things that strikes me in 2009, is that if you look back over history and you look back to Harvey Milk — that was 30 years ago and he was the gay candidate," Sartain said. "In 2009, you are not the gay candidate. You are just a candidate. I don't necessarily think it is helpful for the community to run as the gay candidate. If you are, you might not even get my vote."

Sartain said he's always been involved in public service. "This is certainly a way to be involved in a more significant way," he said of his campaign.

"A lot of people have it in their minds that maybe they want to run for office, but they never take that next step to do it," he said. "They get involved in lobbying and the legislative process, but they don't take that leap and put themselves out there as a candidate."

Sartain worked for the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, a part of the College of Education at N.C. State University. He is a member of the Wake County Library Commission and is active in the life of his two churches, White Memorial Presbyterian and Pullen Memorial Baptist.

In the past, he's served in various church roles, including a stint as interim minister of young adults. As a student at N.C. State University, Sartain worked with the school's LGBT student organization. ■

info: www.sartainforraleigh.com

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