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Candidates address the issues Seven contestants for City Council, two for Mayor square off Nov. 2

informed decisions about who they elect to represent them, The News-Journal provided the candidates with a list of 11 questions. Their answers follow. Candidates for Mayor of Raeford are Bob Gentry (incumbent) and Steve Phillips. Candidates for two Raeford City Council seats are Charles E. Fields, Elle E. Graham, George S. McGuire, James B. McLeod (incumbent), Edwin L. "Eddie" McNeill Jr. (incumbent), Clyde A. Thomas Jr., and Erick Wowra. - Editor.

: How do you feel about the direction of Raeford's growth?

Gentry: I am very much encouraged about the direction of the growth in our city. As you may remember, at one point in the not too distant past we were under a sewer moratorium and could not add even a household on our sewer system. We have expanded, enlarged and improved our system to the point that the moratorium has been lifted. This, however, was not accomplished without the cooperation of The House of Raeford. They began monitoring their pre-treatment very carefully and have continued to be in compliance with their discharge permit. There have been a total of 20 new homes completed in Raeford in the past 18 months. I am told by the realtors that there are few homes on the market that have not been sold.

There is much interest by some of our local developers to build additional homes and apartments and we need to begin immediately to assure them of needed expanded services to meet their needs. This is one reason we need to expand our city by annexing additional areas.

Phillips: With the widening of Highway 401 and the expansion of Fort Bragg, Raeford is going to experience rapid growth. The city needs to stay a step ahead of the anticipated growth by providing the services necessary to direct this growth in a positive direction.

Wowra: I am optimistic about Raeford's economic growth. All the trends are heading in the right direction - a positive direction: an energetic and continuously improving school system, upswing in new housing starts, highnesses. Hopefully we can attract the you won't have to wonder where I stand. type of business and industry that Raeford needs to provide the jobs and services that our citizens want.

McNeill: I feel good about Raeford's growth. I believe that we have had good, positive growth throughout the years. We support four major industries and strive to meet their needs along with the needs of the residents and other businesses of the city.

> : What motivated you to run for office?

Gentry: First and foremost, l enjoy being in the leadership role as mayor. I think and hope you see that I am qualified, dedicated and interested in the future of our city. I further feel that our community needs proven successful business people in the leadership roles. This coupled with the fact that I have been in city government for over 17 years and love it.

Phillips: My experiences as a city councilman have prompted me to seek the office of mayor. Some of the questions the candidates have been asked to respond to indicate areas when we have problems - growth, water, annexation, recreation, city and county relations. Because of our accelerated rate of growth, we will be facing more problems more frequently. These issues will only compound if they are not attended to in a timely and professional manner. The city must take a more progressive approach in its management and in is approach to growth. If we "fail to plan, we plan to fail."

Wowra: I want to extend my current active commitment to the city and it's citizens. Being extensively involved (as listed below), I feel I am qualified and have a broad scope of perspective.

Chairman - Budget/Ways Means Committee Hoke Reading/Literary Council Board of Directors

Chairman - Partners In Education Board of Directors

Chairman- Hoke County Parks and Recreation Board of Directors

President - Raeford/Hoke Plant Managers Association

Member - Hospice Advisory Board Member - Sandhills Community College - Hoke County Center Advisory Committees

We are experiencing growing pains

and whether we like it or not, growth is upon us, knocking at the door.

What we have to do is encourage, entice and literally seek out the right kind of growth which in my opinion is a mixture of new businesses, retail outlets, service providers, manufacturers, possibly some kind of high-tech employers to attract highly skilled workers and keep them here. I've got a lot of friends originally from Racford that moved away long ago. Occassionally when I see one of them, they'll ask, "Charles, why in the world didn't you move from Raeford?"

It's hard to put into words, but the feeling I get when I hear that question is also part of my motivation to run tor office.

McLeod: I was born here in Raeford and have lived here all of my life and so my motivation is probably the same as it is for anyone else seeking a public office. We all want our community to be the best that it can be.

As citizens of Raeford, we all want clean water, police and fire protection, and all the other services that a city can provide and we want the lowest tax rate possible. We want our businesses and industries to be successful and grow.

In order for these things to take place, we must have a strong and sound city government. My motivation is to try to see that we have this at City Hall.

McNeill: I have been a resident of Raeford for 44 years. I have business and family ties to our city. I want to be a part of the promising future ahead for Raeford.

: City annexation proposals received much negative public reaction. Where do you stand on the annexation question?

Gentry: I am in favor of pursuing the annexation as proposed by the study that was recently completed. This annexation is especially needed in the western part of our city because we are experiencing a great deal of interest from developers who want to build houses and apartment complexes in this area. In order for this to happen, we need to build a water tank and enlarge our water lines to provide needed pressure to homes and West Hoke Middle School. I am not in favor of spending City funds for services outside the city prior to ensuring that all of the city residents have ample services. Phillips: I support annexation when annexation can support itself. Whenever an annexation is done, the City should be paid back for capital outlay within seven to 10 years, not the 15 years that were projected in the last annexation proposal. Annexation is necessary to provide services as inexpensively as possible to benefit all citizens. Wowra: Let the "Will of the People" in the areas under consideration for annexation decide the issue. I am not in favor of annexation to simply fund growth. I would suggest however, that a study be performed to determine whether or not the households now benefiting from the City-provided amenities are paying their fair share.

To enable Raeford voters to make Raeford has attracted some new busi- said, I can do it with no hesitation and took the time to come to the meeting felt about the proposal, if only by a quick yes or no poll of the audience.

However, if we were down to the moment of decision on whether or not to annex a certain area, my vote would depend on whether or not it benefit the town as a whole.

I'm for holding down taxes, period, and against almost anything that would raise our taxes even one red cent at this time.

Generally, people inside the city, myself included, have the notion that the more businesses, houses and people within the city limits paying taxes, the better for all and the easier to hold down tax rates.

I believe the city limits should have been expanded years ago and gradually the utilities put into place and paid for as development demanded.

Now, annexation will need to be done slowly and very controlled so as to provide growth but not overwhelm the system.

McLeod: The city will have to look at annexation again in the future. We are already seeing growth and demand for services such as water and sewer just beyond our city limits.

Often the only way these services could be considered by the city from a financial point of view would be through annexation.

If the city is considering annexing an area outside the city limits, then the city should put together a proposal of services for that area that would make it as beneficial as possible for that area.

McNeill: Water and sewer services, fire and police protection and other city services, must be provided to areas that wish annexation.

Areas not willing to pay for these services through annexation are not entitled to these services.

> Are you satisfied with the performance of the city manager?

Gentry: Yes. I have been affiliated with city government for 17 years and I teel that our present manager is more knowledgeable about city administration than anyone we have had during this period of time. This coupled with the fact that he has surrounded himself with the most knowledgeable and efficient staff found in any city the size of ours. or any city regardless of size, makes him a winner. Tom Phillips may not be the most accessible person to all the citizens, or easy for some citizens to talk with, but that is when it is good to have a City Council and a mayor. Out of this group, hopefully everyone will have at least one person that they feel free to talk with and we know how to talk with our manager. Since Tom has been here, we have had a minimum of employee and citizen bickering about services that our city provides. We are audited annually by rules set forth by the League of Municipalities and we have never had one incident of misappropriated City funds Phillips: This is not an appropriate manner in which to discuss personnel matters.

no, because it wouldn't work.

Well, to make a long story short, we got on the next available City Council agenda, presented the problem and my idea of how to fix it at least for the time being and Council approved it unanimously.

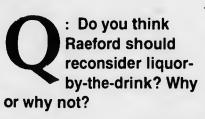
The asphalt works fine, the rainwater goes where it's supposed to and people have just about stopped falling in the street.

McLeod: City managers are like city councilmen: we can all look back and see things that we should have done differently.

We have all made some mistakes in judgment, but hopefully not in our hearts.

The city manager and I have not always agreed on every issue, but yes, I would give him as vote of confidence.

McNeill: Yes, I believe that the city manager has served the city well.



Gentry: This is an issue that I do not think City officials will ever raise on their own. In order to have liquor-bythe-drink, there will have to be sufficient names on a petition requesting that we put this on a ballot for citizens' vote. Personally, I only see family restaurants in Raeford which is not the place to serve liquor. I would hate to see bars in our City.

Phillips: The issue of liquor-by-thedrink should only be considered by way of public referendum.

Wowra: Not at this time. I have strong doubts that liquor-by-the-drink will be of any real economic benefit to the city in the short term.

Thomas: If the residents feel that they need liquor-by-the-drink to raise revenue or bring new businesses to Raeford then I would voice that opinion and if they felt the opposite then I would voice that.

McGuire: Raeford must reconsider liquor-by-the-drink. People are going to go out. We can do something to have them spend some of their money here. If we don't they will continue to get out of town just as fast as they can on that new four lane highway to Fayetteville. All of my entertainment money is spent out of county, because I can't spend it here. Graham: The holy scriptures is very clear on abstinence from strong drink. However, God has given each of us the free will to follow his laws or reject them. We cannot legislate morality through laws that prohibit liquor-bythe-drink. If we do away with that current practice, we could put establishments that service liquor under state supervision. Unauthorized dealers would be out of business or at least have their profits cut to a minimum. Hoke County is supposedly a dry county yet it is number one in statistics for driving while impaired. Raeford wake up and smell the coffee. A reversal of the present policy on alcohol sales would result in various businesses such as restaurants, hotels, etc., operating here. More jobs and revenue for the county. Fields: No I don't. Not if it's simply liquor-by-the-drink, where bars and taverns and clubs could crop up all over. However, if it could be made legal for restaurants of a certain size, seating a certain number of people and serving a full menu, or a hotel with dining, meeting and conference facilities it could actually benefit the town and county a lot.

We need to get community involvement in helping us maintain other recreation areas. We have a beautiful location behind Robbins Heights that is in dire need of updating. However, we need a commitment from the adult citizens who live around the park to help us keep the park clean and the equipment in place and operating properly.

Phillips: The City and the County should work together to provide recreation services for our citizens and their families. I am pleased to see the public's use and support of the new walking track at McLauchlin Park. The success of this project indicates the great need for more recreational activities.

Wowra: To improve Raeford's recreation services, I will:

continue to support the utilization of the ever expanding county parks and recreation department's varied activities for youth, adults and senior citizens; continue to support the upgrade to McLauchlin Park facility (add picnic tables, BBQ grills, and "Health Stations" along the newly installed walking path); support upgrades to Burlington and Robbins Heights parks.

Thomas: I would help start a yearround recreation program to keep our children busy and out of trouble.

McGuire: Raeford's recreation services need to be a joint effort between City and County.

Graham: Yes, my ideas include the plans which Hoke County recreation strategic planning task force researched and recommended.

McLeod: Most of the city's efforts in past years to provide some recreational opportunities have been centered primarily with the city parks. The building and the maintaining of the tennis courts at McLauchlin Park was one of the best things the city has done for recreation. The new walking trail that was just put in by the City at this park has proven to be very popular. The city built a fitness center and put in basketball goals and other equipment at Robbins Park. Some of this equipment is no longer there, but there has been some discussion lately about putting some new recreational equipment back at that park. There is also some thought being given to helping with some new equipment at Burlington Park along with the possibility of putting in a bike trail in Raeford. These are some of the things that the City has done and can continue to do to help with recreation. The City needs to continue to work with and assist where it can with the County recreation department. This is one area that the City and County can continue to work together to provide additional recreational services. Fields: We do need more in the way of recreation and entertainment. I don't know as much about the Parks and Recreation Department as I'd like to but it appears to me they do a fairly good job with what they have. I'd say we need a building somewhere in town where that Department could sponsor some supervised indoor recreational activities. We don't necessarily need to look to Parks and Recreation for all our diversions though. I don't know of too many towns the size of Raeford that don't even have a movie theater, bowling alley, miniature golf, a concert hall or anything. We should encourage many good reputable businesses that could be classified as entertainment or recreation to locate here as we can, in the hopes that a few eventually will. McNeill: The new walking trail in McLauchlin Park has been a great success. I believe this clearly demonstrates the need to expand our recreational opportunities for adults and children.

way 401 upgrade, sewer treatment plant and water system improvements, enthusiastic and professional city employees and concerned citizens, an aggressive economic developer, and an active Chamber of Commerce.

You can sense and see the pride and direction that the city is taking.

Thomas: It makes me feel good that many people have decided to buy or build homes in Raeford but we also need more businesses to come to Raeford.

McGuire: Raeford and Hoke County are growing. I do not like seeing it become another bedroom community for Fayetteville.

Graham: Raeford, like many other southern cities, is experiencing tremendous growth. Our city will continue to receive countless new residents consisting of military, their dependants and people migrating here from larger cities. Many of the new citizens will possess various skills, needs and experiences. We will need to broaden our views in order to channel these additional resources.

It is imperative that Raeford has an economic planning developers who are free to work

Fields: I think we need a lot of improvement. In my opinion, we should be doing everything in our power to encourage not only residential growth but the kind of growth that puts people to work in meaningful, decent-paying jobs with a reasonably secure future so we can attract good people and make them want to stay.

We need growth in retail and discount shopping outlets so those same people can actually find most of the things they need to buy and therefore spend the money they earn right here at home.

We need growth in security and respect for the law and rights of others and less apprehension and alarm every time a sire goes off, for fear that a loved one has fallen victim of someone's careless or criminal act. We have a very capable police chief, but he doesn't even have a holding cell to lock up a violent criminal should one be arrested downtown. • We have got to have the desire, the means and the will to guide growth in the direction we want it to go to benefit

our town. McLeod: The city, as well as the county, has tried to plan ahead for future growth, but growth in our county has come at a faster pace than we anticipated. The growth that we have had has been good. With people moving into the county and new homes being built,

Member - H.E.L.P. (Hoke Emergency Liaison Program) Board of Directors Member - Cape Fear Community

Food Bank Member - SHARE Board of Directors

Member - Lumbee River Council of Government - Private Industry Council

My goal is simply to bring a common sense approach to city government and to do "what's right" to help make Raeford the best city that it can possibly

Thomas: On my job I come in contact with many residents that express dissatisfaction with the way the city handles their problems. They believe that some city employees have forgotten the meaning of being a public servant and I want to bring the meaning back

McGuire: I was motivated to run for office because I found the Raeford City Council would not meet with citizens that wanted to discuss a racist city ordinance.

One of the city councilmen told me on the street that they couldn't have everybody that had a complaint coming in off the street.

We need a city council that will listen to the people they are supposed to be serving. If they don't want to listen, they don't need to be there.

Graham: God has instilled in me a love for people, therefore I am motivated to seek the office of city councilman where I can "represent the people."

The problems that plague the city are not without solutions, and all citizens are entitled to elected officials who have the people at heart.

Representatives of the people need to be responsive to the needs of the people. We are a small city, there is no reason that officials cannot get in touch with the people, listen, talk to them and hear their concerns and ideas. Officials must serve all the people, not just a select few.

Fields: What motivated me to run for city council is simply a strong, deeprooted desire to see Raeford be as good a place to live and work, prosper, raise and educate children, shop, pay for a home and eventually retire as it can possibly be for anyone who wants to do those things.

I'm not a politician. I'm a hard-working, tax-paying citizen who sees that things could be a lot better and wants to help.

I'm not a public speaker either, but if I feel like there are things that need to be

Thomas: Sometimes cities need annexation to raise revenue for its survival but I feel this decision should be made by the residents of Raeford.

McGuire: Nobody wants to pay more taxes. Most of the complaints about annexation are because the homeowners do not want the added expense. The improved services do not seem to be an issue to them.

Graham: Will annexation include meaningful services and rights for the citizens? Or will it create additional burdens for them?

When the reasons for annexation are clear, including the gains for citizens and city, I can make a recommendation for or against it.

If annexation deprives the people of privileges and rights, puts burdens on them, then we need to re-think our motives

If the motive is strictly to raise revenue, then we should search for other motives.

Fields: I think we're going to have to annex some areas in the near future.

We've got to know how people really feel about it in the areas that would be affected. For instance, there was a recent meeting in City Hall with residents from the College Drive area, which I suppose is the negative reaction you're referring to.

The meeting room was packed but only a few people spoke out loud and clear against annexation.

If I were on the Council I would have wanted to know how each person who

Wowra: At the present time I am not in a position to fairly assess the city manager's job competency. However, I am concerned about his approach to economic and industrial growth for Raeford and Hoke County.

Thomas: I really don't know the city manager well enough to answer this question now but if elected I will know. McGuire: No.

Graham: I personally have not met the city manager. However, I disagree with some of the policies under his management. Specifically, regulations governing the use of our city parks makes it very difficult for civic, religious and community organizations to enjoy use of the parks.

Fields: If I had to answer that based on what I know right now, the answer would have to be no. I'll explain.

Some time ago there was a potentially serious problem with guttering along Elwood Avenue next to the old Page Building where our office is located. The guttering at the building had long been broken and worn away and had large holes, cracks and jagged pieces of concrete.

This was something that obviously had to be fixed because of the danger to pedestrians as well as to people parking their cars and trying to get out on the passenger's side.

After much discussion and no action from the city maintenance hierarchy, the city manager informed us that nothing would be done any time soon because the problem was such that if the guttering were filled in it would cause flooding over the sidewalks.

I then suggested that a thin layer of asphalt be rolled in along the whole length of the gutter and was again told

The latter is the only way I would want to consider it and if we couldn't legally have one without the other, I would choose none of the above at this time.

McLeod: In recent years, liquor-bythe-drink has been turned down at least twice by the citizens of Raeford and so I do not think that it should be reconsidered at this time.

McNeill: I think this issue should be decided by the people.

: Do you have any ideas for improving Raeford's recreation services?

Gentry: I am still amazed at the number of people who have welcomed the walking path that we built in the park behind McLauchlin School. This has proven that a much-needed recreation facility was provided with minimum funds. The City employees did much of the work and total funds spent for contracts was only \$10,000. We have discussed and I hope we will soon start on providing several exercise stations around this walking path.



Gentry: A grant application was prepared recently for the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center asking for help with a planning effort for downtown. The concern of the Revitalization Commission is always the economic vitality of the businesses in the city. The proposed project would provide a study of downtown businesses, facilities, and needs. For example, the study might show that our citizens go out of town for specific goods or services. There will also be a survey of the buildings to collect good information on the structural integrity of each one. This is a most difficult issue and I don't know the answers, but I certainly hope we get some help from our grant application.

Phillips: Raeford is on the right track with its downtown revitalization program. Kay Thomas and the revitalization committee are doing an excellent job in maintaining awareness for the need of supporting this area. I feel the city should assist in promoting down-