

Candidates for Lewisville City Council seat meet again

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Two candidates running in the only contested race for a seat on the Lewisville City Council are no strangers to a political faceoff.

Incumbent John Gorena is facing Thomas "T.J." Gilmore for the second time. Last year, Gorena won the Place 4 seat by eight votes in a runoff with Gilmore to fill the unexpired term of Dean Ueckert, who won election as mayor.

Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Rudy Durham has drawn no challengers for his Place 5 seat in the May 8 election. Early voting continues through Tuesday.

Gorena said his priorities have changed little from last year. He still wants the city to do more to address the problem of illegal immigration.

"I'm for legal immigration," said Gorena, who is of Hispanic heritage. "My grandfather was an immigrant to this country."

He supports a plan to train local police officers for a regional task force to enforce immigration laws and would like the city to require contractors to certify that workers are legally authorized to work in the U.S. through the E-Verify system.

Gorena proposed the E-Verify idea a few months ago, but the plan didn't have the support of other council members.

"I'm definitely the lone man out on E-Verify, immigration and a few more issues," he said.

To address budget issues and debt, Gorena said some bond projects could be delayed. He also wants to fill empty retail spaces to increase the tax base.

Gorena also is concerned about the number of rental units in the city and would like to find ways to encourage homeownership and restrict apartment construction.

"One-third of our single-family dwellings are rental properties," Gorena said. "In my opinion, we have upper-middle-class flight from Lewisville."

Since last year, gas drilling has emerged as a growing issue in Lewisville as development in the Barnett Shale continues its eastward expansion.

Gorena said it's important for the nation to become energy self-sufficient. He supports the rights of landowners to drill on their property as long as it's done safely without polluting the water or air. Gorena said he signed a lease for the mineral rights to his property, but no drilling has occurred in his neighborhood.

Gilmore said the city's current oil and gas regulations provide a solid foundation.

"We just need a couple of tweaks and then make sure everyone plays by the rules," Gilmore said, adding that he has no plans to lease his mineral rights.

Gilmore also would like the city to adopt a zero-emissions policy for gas drilling operations, establish a system to monitor the water table for contamination, and require companies to follow industry best practices.

While Gilmore agreed that "the immigration system is broken," he doesn't want to place additional burdens on police that would affect their ability to fight crime.

He said the current system has already deported 1,000 illegal immigrants from the area.

"We can't do it all," Gilmore said. "The city doesn't have an unlimited budget, and the chief continues to look at programs we can leverage that won't overburden police."

To address the projected budget shortfall, Gilmore said the city could delay some capital improvement projects, increase recycling and review the city's rental and storage costs.

"The last thing I'd want to do is touch police and fire," he said.

Gilmore would like to see Lewisville enact a PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program to provide funding incentives for property owners to add energy-efficient improvements to their homes and businesses.

"Lewisville is an older city," Gilmore said. "It's not about building new. It's about improving what we have."