

WHAT TOOK SO LONG [TO DECIDE]?

I'm referring of course to Newton's mayoral election, and my choice to fill that slot in November.

For the past 16 months, I've been embarked on an examination of Newton's political scene, commencing with my involvement in the '08 override election. Knowing little at the outset, I reached out to the sitting board of aldermen for individual meetings. 7 or 8 responded, the first of whom was Ken Parker. Quickly enough, Ken informed me he was running for mayor and invited me to participate in his efforts to build his Blueprint for Newton. I signed on, for three reasons: because I saw it as a great opportunity to quickly learn the issues; because I'd be able to get a first-hand look at Ken's management style and thinking; and because I felt I'd have an opportunity to potentially influence *his* thinking on issues that were important to me.

By October of last year, that effort produced Ken's Blueprint, and I was quite favorably impressed with the candidate behind it, Ken Parker. Following that, folks assumed I was ready to endorse Ken for mayor, but I wasn't. Not because I didn't think him capable, but because I realized I knew so little about the other candidates – particularly Ruth Balser and Setti Warren. [Bill Heck wasn't yet on the scene.] Could one or more actually be stronger than Ken?

Since then I've spent much time, where I could, meeting one-on-one with the other candidates, attending campaign events for each on several occasions, talking with their supporters and taking in many of the mayoral debates that have been held. The one-on-ones were particularly helpful in gaining insights into the candidates and their thinking.

I couldn't help but conclude that all bring quite a bit to the table as viable mayoral possibilities. And perhaps in more normal times, I'd even be able to say that we'd be well served by any of them as our next mayor. My own belief, as buttressed by the reports produced by the Citizen Advisory Group, is that for all of Newton's strengths, we are a city in crisis, and that Newton needs bold new leadership to get us on a more sustainable track going forward.

So, after all these months of intensive evaluation of the candidates, I find myself back to where I started, having concluded that Ken Parker is indeed, in my view, the candidate most likely to be able to guide us through the difficult times ahead. Most will acknowledge he has a firm grasp on all the issues, but that alone isn't enough. Others have that in sufficient depth too. What I found compelling with Ken is how much of a problem identifier and solver he is, how to him every problem has a solution if we look for it, and how open he is to searching far and wide to find those solutions. I believe in "best practices;" so does he. I believe in openness in government; so does he. His Blueprint for Newton, which I referenced earlier, was an early example of that: he wanted his thinking to be out there for all to see, ignoring the cautions of others that putting forth his platform so early was a mistake. He wanted citizen involvement, and citizens played a key role in the Blueprint's development, and still do as he continually refines it. I

believe in civic engagement; so does he. As our next mayor has to make many of the tough decisions to correct our course, the ability to “sell” what needs to be done will be key, and Ken both recognizes that, and has the tools to do that.

I also came away from my “mayoral evaluation” with the belief that Ken, more than the others, truly grasps the fiscal mess we are in, and that he will be committed to tackling that as one of his highest priorities. It is time for us as a city to be completely honest with ourselves as to the real costs of managing Newton. We must get away from year-to-year short-term planning, by building into our “management” budgets the long-term costs of things like capital infrastructure and unfunded liabilities. I am convinced that Ken Parker will do that, even though that will increase the pain we’ll have to absorb to make that happen.

Obviously, others may differ on who’s best to lead Newton forward, but I did want to share my process, and how I came to conclude that what Newton needs most starting in January is a Ken Parker administration.

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