

Thompson to run for county commissioner

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Staff Writer

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Two election cycles removed from an unsuccessful bid for the Charles County Board of Education, Jim Thompson is among the first wave of candidates to file for public office in the 2006 election.

This time, Thompson, a Republican, is stepping up a rung on the political ladder to vie for county commissioner in District 3.

“I think I provide people with the opportunity to be heard, an opportunity to not be part of the mainstream and to be able to hear the other voices in the county,” he said.

La Plata attorney Reuben Collins, a Democrat, has also filed for the District 3 seat currently occupied by Commissioner Allan R. Smith (R), who is thought to be mulling a candidacy for president of the five-member panel.

Thompson, 54, was born in Ogden, Utah, and raised in various Air Force communities across the country. He has lived in Waldorf since 1988 and has worked in various capacities for Safeway for 29 years.

Although Thompson netted 782 votes in the 1998 school board election, according to the Charles County Board of Elections, he believes the experience of running previously will pay dividends.

“When I ran for board of education, I started running very late, plus it was kind of a crowded field,” he said. “It was really a numbers game at that point.”

Thompson, like most other commissioner candidates, will focus his campaign on growth-related issues.

The county is divided between established residents who favor preservation and newer citizens who support additional development

and the services that accompany growth, he said.

“Some are for change, some are against change,” he said. “My feeling is you can’t fight change. It’s going to happen, but you have to be able to guide change and slow change.”

Thompson believes his bold perspective on several hot-button topics will endear him to the voting public. The county should curtail spending, place a cap on taxes, offer incentives for first-time homeowners, re-evaluate the “rubber stamp” on school system funding and explore the possibility of year-round school.

“Just because the money’s in the treasury doesn’t mean we have to spend it,” Thompson said of the budget. “If we can get something back to the residents, whether it’s tax relief or incentives for first-time homebuyers, that’s what I’d like to see.”

Thompson wants to encourage residential developers to build more affordable housing units “instead of these McMansions.”

Year-round school would help in households where both parents work, potentially increase student achievement and provide more consistency for children.

“We have a large influx of children ... who have come from school systems that don’t test as well as ours, and I think a year-round school system will be able to ramp up our test scores,” he said. “I think a lot of kids don’t have anything to do in the summertime, and this would be a good outlet for them.”

Thompson wants to attract federal employers to the county and favors a town center development at the northern end of the county “because that’s the first thing people see as they come through the county.”

The county must also be proactive in shoring up crime prevention efforts, Thompson said.

“As we look to the future, we need to look at areas like Prince George’s [County] that went through this type of migration 20 years ago and some of the good things they did and some of the bad things they did,” he said. “I think Prince George’s underestimated the problem for a lot of years and didn’t address it or didn’t confront it

with funding or public communication on the issue.”

Thompson hopes to conduct a grassroots advocacy and fund-raising campaign that will garner support among a broad public contingent.

“I can relate to the average person. I think the average person is frustrated. That’s why you always have voter apathy. They think they’re not being heard,” he said. “I’m not going to make my mind up ahead of time. I think I do have the ability to make a good decision, a fair decision and analyze what information we have.”

Thompson has been married for 32 years and has two grown children.

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