

Candidates explain their positions on:

Crosstown Connector

By **JOE SUTTER**

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The crosstown connector has been one of the hot topics in Fort Dodge local politics for the past year.

A downtown street realignment is key to the plan, joining First Avenue South and Second Avenue South with a new curving section of road between Fifth and Sixth streets. That

new section would join First Avenue South at a roundabout intersection at Sixth Street.

After the new street link is constructed, First Avenue South would be converted to two-way traffic downtown, making it a two-way street for its entire length.

The construction of a privately owned recreation center at Second Avenue South dovetails with the

proposal.

The plan was adopted by the City Council in 2008. However, a new council majority elected in November 2011 made what it called a "crosstown connector slowdown" a priority. That new majority consisted of councilmen Kim Alstott, Dean Hill, Robert "Barney" Patterson, Mark Taylor and Don Wilson.

Alstott later changed his position

and supported the connector.

The council reached a compromise in September 2012 which secured the funding for the project to be done in 2014. The council also decided to begin work on drainage issues along First Avenue South east of Veterans Bridge.

On that vote, Alstott, Dave Flattery, Andy Fritz, Hill, Patterson and Wilson voted yes. Taylor voted no.

Government's role in creating housing

By **JOE SUTTER**

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Approximately one-third of the homes in Fort Dodge were built before 1950, according to Tom Chalstrom, chairman of the

Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance Housing Committee.

Chalstrom has stated that Fort Dodge has a great need for modern, up-to-date housing as expanding businesses bring new jobs to

the area. The city has been working with the Growth Alliance to meet this need.

Chalstrom said in October 2012 that the highest housing demand is right around the

\$150,000 to \$250,000 price range.

The Growth Alliance also built four homes, beginning in June 2012, in order to encourage further housing development.

Reorganization of public works

By **JOE SUTTER**

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A reorganization of the Fort Dodge Public Works Department has been under discussion.

A plan to reduce the department from six divisions down to three was introduced to the city council by City Manager David Fierke and Public Works Director Greg Koch

at the June 25, 2013, City Council meeting.

The department has 46 employees in the sanitation, streets, traffic safety, vehicle maintenance, utilities distribution and water meter divisions. The proposal from Fierke would create water utility, streets and sanitation, and vehicle maintenance divisions.

One reason for this proposed change is the city's plan to begin using new garbage trucks that use a mechanical arm to lift and empty containers of trash and recyclables. The trucks only take one person to operate, so once they arrive next year, fewer people will be needed in the sanitation division.

In August the city approved one

part of the plan, voted to create the position of Water Utility Distribution Superintendent. This position was needed to fulfill Iowa Department of Natural Resources regulations.

Fierke said that person will have to have what the DNR calls a Grade 4 license. An internal hire is possible, he said, since two employees in the department have that license.

Continuing the economic upswing

By **JOE SUTTER**

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In April, The Messenger reported that the Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance has estimated that 365 new jobs will be

created in Webster County by 2014. Many of those jobs are being created by Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc., Cargill and CJ Bio America.

New businesses have been

opening along Fifth Avenue South in the Corridor of Commerce. Panchero's, Jimmy John's, Holiday Inn Express and CVS/pharmacy are some of the new names that have come to

town.

Candidates for the upcoming City Council election were asked what the local government should do to ensure the economic upswing continues.

THE CANDIDATES

Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	At-Large
One seat	One seat	One seat	One seat	Two seats
Terry Moehnke	Steven Clayton	Dave Flattery	Kim Alstott	Andy Fritz
Mark Taylor	Don Wilson	Richard Higgins	(unopposed)	Jeffrey Halter
				Greg Nolting



Terry Moehnke

Terry Moehnke

Address: 222 Crestview Drive

Why you might know him: Led the effort to create Veterans Memorial Park; Noon Sertoma member

Occupation: Optometrist



Mark Taylor

Mark Taylor

Address: 100 Fifth St. N.W.

Why you might know him: Seeking his second term on the council

Occupation: Retired from U.S. Army

Crosstown Connector

“It’s irresponsible to turn down the state grant money and the money that’s been set aside to repair roads that need to be repaired anyway.

“The road on First Avenue South is in poor shape, and is in dire need of replacement and upgrade,” Moehnke said.

“At the present time we’re looking at over \$2 million in state grants. We’ve also had money set aside since 2010 from the city, plus the (Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District) money and the voluntary contributions to start the construction. I think it’s foolish to turn down the so-called ‘free money’ to repair something that’s going to need repairing anyway.”

Taylor has consistently opposed the project.

“Unless the facts have changed on this special project, it will take millions of dollars away from other street projects,” he said. “The local option sales tax was voted in by the people to get the streets done, not special projects.”

He said the city may end up with higher costs due to the proposed rec center.

“If this crosstown connector is truly about a rec center, which was briefed to the council, then show us the center can be built and operated without increasing our property taxes,” Taylor said. “The current city improvements, however nice they are, they’ve come at a cost.”

Government’s role in creating housing

“We’ve got several good plans. In fact, we do need to excite some of our contractors and developers with the growth that’s happening in Fort Dodge,” Moehnke said.

Because more people will be coming in looking for homes, the city should make tax incentive money available, and tax increment financing when development is in the right area.

“At the present time I don’t think we’re building enough new structures to satisfy the needs of the people that are coming into the community,” he said.

“I’m all in favor of making it easy for contractors to build new houses, and I think the city should aggressively work with private development and lending institutions to make this a reality.”

“We’ve expanded the urban revitalization zone to cover a majority of the city. This entitles homeowners to tax relief on new construction and home improvements. Several projects have already used this.

“Staff is currently working with developers on possible projects. Some of those, the conversion of the old junior high schools into apartments, and the old Sears building downtown, those projects are all moving forward.”

Reorganization of public works

“The public works department, obviously, is a union shop, so we have to honor and respect the contracts that have been negotiated with the unions in the past.”

Moehnke said he believes a solution can be reached through proper communication.

“I don’t think anybody would endorse or encourage any kind of change in a personnel issue without consulting with people who are going to be affected. I think we need to give them clear-cut direction, and explain to them exactly why things are being done,” he said.

“I think we’re going to see a streamlined department, and I can see where some of the jobs may need to be reconsidered.”

“I’m not sure I liked the way that played out. The ink wasn’t dry on the newly negotiated union contracts when staff wanted to make big changes.

“Council directed city staff to go back with those people, with the union and work this thing out, and that’s what we’ve been telling them to do. I really want staff and the union to work this out without going to arbitration, and costing the city more time and money.

“I don’t want it brought up to the council, because we can’t sit up there and negotiate contracts as a council.”

Continuing the economic upswing

“I think the city itself is basically here to ensure the economic development is not stymied. That we can reach out to these businesses and make it a friendly and comfortable transition, from planning to reality. I think the biggest thing for government at this point is to make sure we do not impede progress.”

Housing and quality of life issues also need to be addressed, he said.

“Once the downtown connector project is underway,” he said, “the revitalization of downtown is going to fall into place very quickly.”

“The city’s role on that is to set the conditions,” Taylor said. “It’s really going to take private investment to take the lead on that. We put in place quite a few programs and incentives to do that, tax abatement which doesn’t cost the city any money but eventually adds to the tax base.”

Tax increment financing is another important tool, he said.

“We’ve also established enterprise zones, which gives businesses a sales tax break. We’ve put a lot of things into place, and it seems to be working in a few places.”



Steven Clayton

Steven Clayton

Address: 1355 S. 24th St.

Why you might know him: Meriwether Lodge member

Occupation: Owner of Clayton's Ribs and Chicken, Fort Dodge Correctional Facility officer



Don Wilson

Don Wilson

Address: 1320 S. 24th St.

Why you might know him: Seeking his sixth term on the council

Occupation: Retired homebuilder

Crosstown Connector

Clayton said he is not against the project, but is not 100 percent for it either, because he doesn't have 100 percent of the information.

"I do know there's some work that needs to be done, as far as in front of the Warden Plaza," he said.

"I'd like to know the actual benefit of it — what is it really going to do for Fort Dodge? With the amount of money it's going to be ... I just want to make sure it's going to be spent wisely."

"My position from day one — which was about six years ago when that came up — is that we were starting at the wrong end. I wanted to start out on 29th street and work our way back.

"We've had all kinds of infrastructure problems there, traffic flow problems," he said. "The downtown part was not a big thing for me because I've listened to the people, and the residential streets were much more important than spending millions of dollars on this crosstown connector."

Government's role in creating housing

"It takes money to do anything," Clayton said, asking where the money would come from.

"To talk about it is wonderful, but everybody talks. Let's put the talk into action, and find the right location, and let's get the houses built," he said. "Anything to create better homes for the people of Fort Dodge."

"We need to make sure we're looking out for the people," he added.

"We have several platted lots in Fort Dodge already, that are already platted for subdivisions. What we need to do is convince bankers and developers that there is a need for new housing, in the \$150,000 range," Wilson said.

"The city doesn't have any money to develop them ourselves, but we have to encourage bankers and developers," he added.

Reorganization of public works

"I'm not 100 percent sure," Clayton said. "Once again is it going to benefit the people of Fort Dodge to reorganize?"

He said he wasn't completely familiar with the plan, but he was concerned about people losing jobs.

"If we're going to downsize, then who's going to lose their job? We've got enough people out of work," he added. "That's the city workers. They know more about what's going on in the city than I do. If I take the time to listen to what they have to say, I can guarantee those are the type of people we need — people who know what's going on in the town."

Wilson said the city has the right to reorganize the department, but the city workers must be a part of any restructuring.

"I would like to see this done by listening to the employees, and taking their input," he said. "These are the employees that go out when it's rain, sleet, snow, fixing water main breaks, doing all this when we're asleep so we can get to work in the morning."

"I feel that the morale of our city workers is at the lowest point I've seen in my 10 years on the council. We need to get morale back up so everything can run smoothly."

Continuing the economic upswing

"We're on a roll right now with CJ Bio. CJ Bio and Cargill is a good move for Fort Dodge," Clayton said. "I'm 100 percent for that. But I'm only wondering how many people are they going to employ from the city of Fort Dodge?"

He said he hoped that workers would be hired from Fort Dodge, and not just brought in from other areas.

"We've got to put people back to work," he said.

The city needs to communicate well with companies to help them come here, he added.

"We are seeing a form of an upswing because I think we have hit rock bottom," he said.

He said the agricultural park has been good for Fort Dodge. He's also seen positive things happening on Fifth Avenue South, though he said the city is "getting saturated with restaurants and hotels."

"I think we're on the right path for slow growth. I've always liked slow growth because it gives us a chance to improve our infrastructure, our roads and our streets."

"I feel, for more of an economic boom, we need to lower our taxes. This is why a lot of people aren't coming to Fort Dodge, because they've seen our taxes are so high."

"Anybody can run a city and make it look beautiful if you're going to raise your taxes so high that nobody can live here."



Dave Flattery

Dave Flattery

Address: 1310 N. 29th St.

Why you might know him: Former at-large councilman, seeking his second term for Ward 3

Occupation: President of CSBank



Richard Higgins

Richard Higgins

Address: 3343 10th Ave. N.

Why you might know him: Has previously run for at-large and Ward 3 seats

Occupation: Retired from retail management, works part-time at JCPenney

Crosstown Connector

“I do support the crosstown connector. Business and industry support it as well. I believe the improvements we made on the Fifth Avenue South corridor are the same type of improvements we’ll see in the downtown.”

“The project is \$6.5 million. Out of that project, about \$2.5 million is grant funding we have received from both the DOT and SSMID. I’m concerned that if this project fails and we have to give this money back to the state, it could jeopardize any future DOT funding for infrastructure needs that we may have down the road.”

He said the project will help clean up slum and blight in the downtown.

He also said the city doesn’t have sufficient funds to repair all the streets in town. Instead, it needs to leverage its dollars in projects that can bring in state and federal money.

Higgins said he is not necessarily against the connector, but that there are still too many unanswered questions.

“Where’s all this money coming from, and what is the situation with this rec center? Who’s involved in that, how much money is that going to cost?” he said. “I am not against the crosstown connector, I just want an answer to where the money is coming from, who will benefit from this and what it’s going to cost the taxpayer.”

“I know I don’t like them using local option sales tax on this,” he said. “I feel that should be used for our streets.”

He said if elected, he’d like to conduct a poll to find out if the people were in favor of it.

Government’s role in creating housing

“For me it’s twofold. We have to address the aging current housing stock that we have, and secondly we have to look at the means to create new housing, either single-family or multi-family housing.”

“The majority of our housing stock was built before the 1950s. And a goodly portion of that is in and around the downtown area. Those are historic neighborhoods, those are beautiful neighborhoods, but they are showing rapid decay, and slum and blight.”

To fix this, the city should start with the crosstown connector, which will revitalize downtown and pave the way for growth in the historic neighborhoods, he said.

He said current tax abatements are important, and the city must find creative ways to work with developers. “When you work with developers, they have to put their own personal capital at risk.”

“Lower the tax rate and prorate it for 10 years,” Higgins said. “I like 10 percent per year, to get the housing started.”

Reorganization of public works

“We haven’t as a council decided where we go with public works. But if the end result is we can make our operations more efficient, more effective, then I support reorganizing the public works.”

“If they’re going to reorganize the department, they need to be upfront with the workers, which they weren’t,” Higgins said. “And I feel they should promote within the department, instead of going outside to take these new jobs, or in this new organization.”

“I believe when an employee works up the ladder they should be rewarded. When I promoted somebody myself in the retail business, it was always someone promoted from within. That’s the way it should be.”

Continuing the economic upswing

“Continue with following the course of the Envision 2030 plan. We have to have strong leadership; that is important when we’re looking at trying to attract new business and industry.”

“We have to make Fort Dodge a place that can attract skilled labor, by expanding retail, enhancing recreational opportunities, and developing the downtown. And we as a council need to work as a team and eliminate personal agendas. I think that’s important as well.”

“Eliminate the burdensome restrictions on new business. Have the local government get out of their way for progress. Instead ask them ‘How we can help you?’” Higgins said.

He said businesses should get tax breaks to help them move into the city.

“I think we need something to spur the contractors to come in, to say ‘Hey look, Fort Dodge is giving us some breaks.’ Maybe ease up a little bit. Don’t take all restrictions away, but maybe ease up on some of them, work something out with the builders to continue to get some new businesses in here.”

WARD 4

Running unopposed



Kim Alstott

Kim Alstott

Address: 1232 N. Seventh St.

Why you might know him: Seeking his second term on the council

Occupation: Financial counselor

AT-LARGE

One of three candidates for two seats



Andy Fritz

Andy Fritz

Address: 1222 S. 25th St.

Why you might know him: Seeking his second term on the council; co-founder It Gets Better Fort Dodge

Occupation: Assistant department manager at Menards

Crosstown Connector

“It took me four months to do the research on that, but I came up with that I would be for it. I found out if we would give back the money, that \$2.4 million, that we would have a hard time getting more grants coming in to us.”

It would also be a good chance to fix some streets that need it, he said.

“I am in favor of the crosstown connector. I’ve been in favor of it all along. I would hope that after the election we can get back to business and get the crosstown connector going, and put aside the stalling games we’ve had for the last couple years.”

Government’s role in creating housing

“It’s a big thing for me. I’ve been talking about that for the last two years. I think it’s essential that we get a housing developer in here to start building houses.

“What happens is if we get more housing here, it brings up our tax base more. Hopefully it will keep us from having to raise property taxes any more in the future if you get more people coming in.”

“I like the use of incremental financing, tax abatements to help out developers. The city needs to stay out of the real estate market though. We don’t need to sell houses, like we have tried with the Growth Alliance.

“But if a developer comes in with a hundred-unit proposal and is looking for some tax financing, I feel the city should do what they can to help that investor out, because in the long run that’s property taxes for the city.”

Reorganization of public works

“I found out about every 10 years they reorganize it. This is into the 10th year,” Alstott said.

“Basically it’s cross-training people to do different jobs, which I think is OK. ... It would be beneficial for us as citizens to have those guys be able to do different jobs. And also for them too.”

“The public works department reorganization is to help make things more efficient,” Fritz said.

“I know there’s been a lot of dissonance from the workers. They’re worried about their jobs, their seniority, their bidding rights. I don’t want to create any kind of a hostile work environment.

“I want them to know they can still come to their job 7 to 3, or whatever it may be – but knowing we have to have some kind of reorganization down there to save the department and the city some money.”

Continuing the economic upswing

“I think we need to work with manufacturing, I think we need to work with retailing, or other companies coming in, to ensure we get more of these people coming in,” said Alstott.

Fort Dodge is in a good position with Cargill right now, because that business will bring in others, he said.

To help encourage companies to move to Fort Dodge, “if things come up and they want us to look at something, to help them do something, I think we should take a serious look at that,” he said. “Not that we give them the farm, but if we can do things to encourage them to come in, I think we should do that. ... There’s cities all over this country just begging for manufacturing to come in. They’re offering anything and everything to them. We have to be aware of that.”

“In this day and age, cities, towns are getting more and more involved in courting businesses to come to their communities. Not that it’s necessarily the right thing to do, but everybody’s playing that ball game now.

“So we at the city have to continue to offer the tax increment financing, to offer whatever it may be as far as tax abatements, or if we need to make additions or changes at our water plants, or our water treatment facilities. We have to be willing to meet somewhere in the middle with the company and the tax dollars to entice those companies to come to Fort Dodge.”

Two of three candidates for two seats



Jeffrey Halter

Jeffrey Halter

Address: 1446 S. 21st St.

Why you might know him: Has previously run for Ward 2 seat; secretary, Young Professionals; serves on Growth Alliance Image Committee

Occupation: Coordinator of the Transition Alliance Program



Greg Nolting

Greg Nolting

Address: 1820 Fifth Ave. S.

Why you might know him: Previously served five years on the council and six years as a Webster County supervisor; neighborhood watch organizer

Occupation: Owner, Nolting Oil

Crosstown Connector

“I support it for several reasons. I see it as three different parts,” Halter said.

First is the street realignment.

“We have grants to cover the majority of that part of the project. Some of that grant money has already been spent on that project. If we were to not go forward with it, we would be in a position where we’re looking to pay back approximately half a million dollars that has already been spent for those grants.”

He also said creating a rec center or civic center in the newly created open space would improve the quality of life in Fort Dodge.

First Avenue South is also in “dire need of repairs,” he said, so it makes sense to continue with this project that will fix the street.

Nolting said he thinks the plan is a good plan, but said it’s not the best use of city money.

“There’s only so much money, so you have to look at your priorities,” he said. “I would like to get the existing streets fixed.”

He said there’s about \$3.5 million of local option sales tax money which will be spent on the connector, which should be used on existing streets instead.

“Instead of building something new, let’s just fix what we have.”

Government’s role in creating housing

“There’s a lot of properties and vacant areas within the city that could be addressed, where we could add housing,” Halter said. “I would like to support initiatives going to people to improve their current properties, and to add properties to some of those empty pockets that exist in our city.”

He said it’s also important for the city to create new developments where housing can be built, such as the Orchard Glen housing development near Village Inn, or the Windstone Circle Townhomes development near U.S. Highway 169.

“We’re going to be adding new jobs to Fort Dodge, we have an influx of workers in Fort Dodge, and finding places for people to live has been a struggle, so it’s important for us as the local government needs to address that.”

“Local government should be involved in slums, blighted area and low-income housing,” Nolting said.

On the other end of the spectrum, he said, the city should work with investors and bankers to determine what is needed.

“With the bankers, they really have a handle on what the needs are,” he said.

Reorganization of public works

“We have to be respectful of those who pay the taxes, and I feel our responsibility is to spend their money in the most cost-effective and efficient way we can,” said Halter.

At the same time changes must be made slowly in a way that the city workers understand, that the workers feel is fair, and that honors union and bargaining agreements, he said.

“It’s how are we able to be the most cost-effective, efficient we can be, but at same time honoring their contracts, honoring their agreements, and making sure they feel everything is done fairly, and making sure they understand the reasons as to why it’s being done,” he said.

“I’ll be honest, I don’t have a lot of knowledge about that,” Nolting said. “I will say from my experience of working with city and county workers, the thing I have found is, you treat them fair and honest, and they’ll treat you fair and honest.”

Continuing the economic upswing

“I’m a big believer that making community development plans that improve the quality of life in Fort Dodge are extremely important,” Halter said. “To give us the opportunity to continue to expand our economic development.”

The city needs to keep improving entertainment and recreational offerings, such as parks, playgrounds and trails, he said.

“As we continue to make more economic development plans, and capitalize on the great things we have going on, that will make easier for those companies to get people to come here and stay here.”

“This is something I’ve been very involved with my whole political career,” Nolting said. “I was one of the five supervisors that started the first corn-processing plant out at the ag park. ... It is critical that we continue with the growth out in those areas.”

Whenever new industries come to town, “We’re competing with other cities for that business. The big thing is the incentive package we can put together. A lot of times that will determine if they come here or go somewhere else,” he said.

“That’s why I think we need to be frugal with other expenditures, to make sure everybody understands that’s one of the big key issues of bringing businesses here. If we spend it on something else then we cannot offer these incentive packages.”