



Trustee and D181 candidates profiled

Four seek three village board seats, five vie for four school board seats

Hinsdale voters will have ballot choices for the Hinsdale Village Board and Community Consolidated Elementary District 181 Board on Tuesday, April 2.

Scott Banke, Bill Cotter, Laurel Haarlow and incumbent Luke Stifflear are the village board candidates, with Banke, Haarlow and Stifflear running as a team.

In District 181, Keith Bram, Sinead Duffy, Sarah Jakobsen, William Merchantz and Sheetal Rao are running for four seats on the board.

— compiled by Ken Knutson

Hinsdale Village Board



Scott Banke

Background
Age: 55
Years in village: 29
Education: BS, finance, Arizona State University
Occupation:
business systems integration manager, CME Group Inc.
Community service:
Hinsdale Little League, Hinsdale Theater Foundation, HCHS Baseball Club, local school fundraisers
Board experience:
former Hinsdale Village Caucus, Hinsdale Theater Foundation and baseball club treasurer; former interim Hinsdale village trustee; former Hinsdale Parks and Recreation commissioner and chair; Hinsdale Board of Fire and Police Commissioners

Qualifications
Banke has volunteered his time and expertise to advance numerous village causes over the years. He said these experiences have afforded him a unique window into the community's needs.
"Through these experiences, I have been able to leverage my professional background in technology and finance to lend consultative insight and expertise to help address critical issues," Banke said.

Why is he running?
"I want to serve my community and believe I have the temperament, discipline and problem-solving skills necessary to help our community," he said.



Bill Cotter

Background
Age: 37
Years in village: 6
Education: BA, DePaul University; JD, Chicago-Kent College of Law; executive education, University of Chicago Booth School of Business
Occupation:
attorney and small business owner
Community service:
none
Board experience:
none

Qualifications
As general counsel to a construction project management firm, Cotter would bring his expertise to bear on village capital improvement projects. He also worked as a criminal prosecutor and, as a small business owner, understands the challenges faced by the local business community.

Why is he running?
Cotter said he wants to represent the interests of young families in village government and to promote a culture that makes Hinsdale a top choice for families to call home.

"With major construction projects on the horizon, both benefiting (downtown parking deck) and impacting (I-294 expansion) the village, my expertise in construction law will be a unique benefit to the village at this particular time," he said.



Laurel Haarlow

Background
Age: 52
Years in village: 40
Education: BA, Smith College; master's in landscape architecture, University of Virginia
Occupation:
stay-at-home mom
Community service:
Wellness House wine auction co-chair, school volunteer, IGLA & AYSO coach, church leadership positions, Junior League of Chicago, Hinsdale 2020 SEG
Board experience:
Hinsdale Caucus, Hinsdale Design Review Commission, inaugural president of Hinsdale Historical Society Women's Board

Qualifications
Haarlow grew up in Hinsdale and has a deep fondness for the village's unique character. Her professional background as a landscape architect gives her a different perspective than those on the board working in the financial or legal fields.

Why is she running?
Haarlow said Hinsdale's legacy is one of being a highly desirable community, and she praised village leaders for taking steps to preserve that status.

"In recent years, Hinsdale's trustees have worked diligently and successfully to restore the village to sound financial footing, while at the same time executing the major and necessary elements of the infrastructure master plan," Haarlow said. "I am interested in sustaining and furthering this progress and contributing to our beautiful community."



Luke Stifflear

Background
Age: 50
Years in village: 15
Education: BA, economics, State University of New York at Oswego; MBA, University of Illinois
Occupation:
fund manager, PPM America
Community service:
AYSO & Wind Lacrosse coach
Board experience:
current village trustee; former board member, Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana; former Hinsdale plan commissioner

Qualifications
Serving as chair of the village's zoning and public safety committee and as a former plan commissioner, Stifflear is well-acquainted with the village's zoning code. His work on various professional committees has allowed him to serve larger constituencies and develop effective communication, negotiating and structuring skills.

Why is he running?
Stifflear said he is now more experienced and better able to serve the village than he was when elected four years ago and would like to complete initiatives with which he is involved. He also wants to work toward the uncontentious redevelopment of the Institute of Basic Life Principles property.
"I want to remain on the board so that I can facilitate the development of this property," he said.



Keith Bram

Background
Age: 54
Years in district: 5
Attendance area: Prospect
Education: BA, University of Arizona; DDS, University of Missouri-Kansas City Dental School
Occupation:
dentist
Community service:
dozens of fundraisers
Board experience:
American Cancer Society

Qualifications
He pointed to life experiences and ebullient support from many others.

Why is he running?
He cited emails from D181 volunteers and employees encouraging him to run, along with support from colleagues.



Sinead Duffy

Background
Age: 49
Years in district: 5
Attendance area: Prospect
Education: BA, BS, MA, business studies, Trinity University (Dublin)
Occupation:
former senior financial professional
Community service:
volunteer for Team for Kids, serving with the Prospect PTO
Board experience:
none

Qualifications
She pointed to her decade and a half of experience in accounting, strategic planning, valuation and risk functions and her expertise in project management, implementing controls for the measurement of business, operational and market risks.

Why is she running?
Duffy believes this is an exciting time for the district, with the opening of the new Hinsdale Middle School and recent hiring of key administrators. She also values public education is able to devote the necessary time to the endeavor.

"The former board had to make some tough and sometimes difficult decisions, such as hiring and firing of a superintendent and some necessary, but difficult, budget cuts," she said. "I would like to ensure that we can deliver on our district's strategic plan, which we are in the mid-point of implementation."



Sarah Jakobsen

Background
Age: 43
Years in district: 2.5
Attendance area: Prospect
Education: BA, Wittenberg University
Occupation:
litigation consultant
Community service:
classroom volunteer, bike usability task force in Minnesota
Board experience:
none

Qualifications
Jakobsen's work experience has equipped her with strong proficiency in data analysis, along with patience and confidence in a leadership role.

She also met frequently alongside clients who were facing extremely painful circumstances. Working with clients to collect information while allowing them to tell their story is a skill she believes will translate to board meetings and other interactions in the community.

Why is she running?
As a relatively new resident in the district, she said she has been looking for an opportunity to give back to the community in a meaningful way.

"Schools were a significant reason that our family moved here, and when I heard about the board seats opening, it felt like a great chance to give back," she said.



William Merchantz

Background
Age: not provided
Years in district: 16
Attendance area: Monroe
Education: BS, University of Illinois at Chicago College of Business Administration
Occupation:
retired software industry entrepreneur
Community service:
D181 finance & digital technology committees, AYSO & Jodie Harrison coach, Indian Princesses chief
Board experience:
current D181 board member, University of Illinois Alumni Board, University of Illinois Foundation Board

Qualifications
Leading a technology firm and serving on a foundation board helped him understand the distinct organizational roles of a CEO and that of a board.

Appointed in September to fill a vacancy on the D181 board, he participates in all three board subcommittees (finance and academics) and serve on the HCHTA contract negotiations team.

Why is he running?
Merchantz wants to continue and complete the tasks he has been involved with since joining the board.

"Being reappointed by voters will allow me to complete the teacher contract negotiations, offer my years of finance and facility experience to three new board members, and offer our recently hired superintendent and his academic team continuity of leadership and support," he said.



Sheetal Rao

Background
Age: 40
Years in district: 4
Attendance area: Prospect
Education: BS, chemical engineering, University of Illinois; MS, physiology, Georgetown University; MD, Georgetown University School of Medicine
Occupation:
primary care physician
Community service:
co-chair and volunteer for various school activities and fundraisers; Bridge Communities and Feed My Starving Children event volunteer; Clarendon Hills Master Plan committee

Board experience:
DuPage Medical Group Charitable Fund Advisory Board, CHC02 co-founder and secretary

Qualifications
Her medical training has honed her ability to read and process information quickly, and her engineering background equipped her with problem-solving and teamwork skills. Being a mother has taught her the importance of helping children reach their highest potential in an emotionally healthy way.

Why is she running?
She said she is passionate about the positive impact a great education can have on a child and the surrounding community.
"I feel it is imperative for parents of children who attend district schools to be involved in decisions that impact those schools," she said. "This is a good time for me to run because my children are at an age where they are becoming more independent."