

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Getting ready for the big contest? So are we!

Hinsdale, it's cold outside!

Just in time, spring election activity is heating up, and you can trust your source for community news to keep you informed on the issues and the races.

Village residents face a brimming ballot on April 2, with contested races for village board, Community Consolidated Elementary District 181 and Hinsdale High School District 86 along with a \$139 million referendum for District 86.

You may have noticed that our coverage kicks off today on Page 5, with part one of our seven-part series on this third iteration of the referendum to fund improvements at Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools. We also provide information on voter registration, and Pam Lannom, in her column, lays out guidelines for submitting a letter to the editor. Check it out, because we certainly appreciate hearing from our readers, and we know other readers do, too.

Next week we'll provide an overview of the top issues in the village and the school districts and deliver the referendum series' second installment with a retrospective of how the district got to this point.

The Feb. 14 issue will look at the job of a board member and furnish candidate bio charts for a

reader-friendly breakdown of each person seeking office in the contested races. The referendum series will continue by exploring the views of residents on either side of the contentious ballot question.

Upcoming editions will examine in more detail the issues facing the village and school districts while trying to put the referendum in context with other recent similar measures in our area and looking at how teacher salaries, property tax rates and other potential funding sources factor into the conversation.

Just to set the table, here's a refresher on the April 2 candidates. Incumbents Luke Stifflear and Michael Ripani are vying with challengers Scott Banke, Bill Cotter and Laurel Haarlow for three open seats on the village's board of trustees.

In District 181, Keith Bram, Sinead Duffy, Sarah Jakobsen, William Merchantz and Sheetal Khedkar Rao are seeking to fill four spots on the board.

District 86 offers the most hotly contested race, with incumbent Kathleen Hirsman joined on the ballot by Fotini Bakopoulos, Cynthia Hanson, Erik Held, Matthew Marron, Yvonne Mayer and Urszula Tanouye, all seeking one of three four-year terms on the board. Nagla Fetouh and Marty



Turek are vying for the unexpired two-year term of former board member Robin Gonzales.

The Hinsdale Public Library Board has the only uncontested race in the election, with incumbent Julie Liesse, John Bloomfield and Ling Zeng set to assume the three open seats.

The Hinsdalean will hold a candidates' night, starting at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 14, at The Community House, to provide residents with the opportunity to hear from the candidates in each of the races. The forum will be in question/answer style, not a debate, in an effort to give each hopeful an equal window to share her or his views.

The objective through all of our coverage is to both educate and engage the local electorate. After all, the choices are yours.

Every election story will be posted on our website, thehinsdalean.com, from the day it runs until the election. Comments or questions? Please send them to news@thehinsdalean.com.

COMMENTARY

Talk amongst yourselves — or send us a letter

I love covering elections.

I always have. Few things are more important to a community newspaper, in my opinion, than giving voters the information they need to make informed choices when they head to the polls.

That means we are spending *a lot* of time right now interviewing candidates and writing stories in advance of the April 2 election. We've got a record number of candidates — 19 — running for the Hinsdale Village Board and the District 181 and District 86 school boards. I can't remember the last time all three races were contested. Even the single two-year term on the District 86 board has attracted two candidates. Add in a \$139.8 million referendum, and there's plenty going on.

We're happy to see that a number of other people are paying attention to what's going on as well. A handful already have chosen to share their viewpoints with other Hinsdaleans by writing a letter to the editor.

An experienced editor once said the job of a paper's editorial page

isn't to solve all the problems in a community, it's to start a conversation. And letters to the editor certainly are an important part of that conversation.

We do ask letter writers to follow the requirements we print on the bottom of Page 11, namely stick to our 250-word limit (so we have room for three letters a week) and provide documentation for any facts they state in their letters.

That's where things can get a little sticky. The line between fact and opinion can be fine. So let's use the District 86 referendum as an example in a couple of scenarios to differentiate between the two.

Letter No. 1.

Writer: The board is not going to cut \$3.6 million from the budget. It's a scare tactic.

The writer might think that's an opinion, but it conflicts with the facts.

Fact: The board has approved \$3.6 million in annual cuts, starting



Pamela Lannom

in 2019-20, to pay for \$42 million in projects over the next six years. The board has already voted to make the cuts, so saying it won't do so is inaccurate.

What can a writer offer?

An opinion: I don't believe the board will go through with the cuts if the referendum fails. It feels like a scare tactic.

Letter No. 2.

Writer: The board is lying about life safety violations so voters will approve a larger referendum.

Again, this is not an opinion and it conflicts with the facts.

Fact: The referendum includes mandated life-safety repairs that must, by law, be completed in a certain period of time and a list of projects, labeled priority C, that have been included because they will need to be addressed at some point in the near future.

What could the writer say?

An opinion: Life safety items that aren't mandated should not



be included in the referendum. Doing so only creates a higher dollar amount and could confuse residents.

The differences in wording are subtle but significant.

Some think we pick and choose the letters we run based on the opinion the writer expresses, but I can assure you that's not the case.

We run every letter we receive that meets the requirements, up to three a week. And we often add pages to the paper as we get closer to an election so we can run more letters.

Nineteen candidates. A \$139.8 million referendum. There's much to discuss between now and April 2. And we're honored to help facilitate that conversation.

— Pamela Lannom is editor of *The Hinsdalean*. Readers can email her at plannom@thehinsdalean.com.