

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH** Peter Schwartzman**What type of Mayor do we need?**

In about two months, local elections will be held. They won't get the coverage that the national one recently did, but they are just as important in terms of Galesburg's future. The national economic crisis hasn't hit all regions of the country at the same time or with the same intensity, and any recovery is also going to be felt differently from place to place. The reasons for this are numerous but certainly our local leadership has (and will continue to have) a part to play. The representatives that we elect this April — which most notably includes a new mayor and three city council members — will be very important to how our city and county respond to our current economic, employment, and environmental challenges.

Rather than promote a certain candidate here, I plan to outline what I think are some of the more important characteristics that we need in a mayor. I do so as a means for opening up discussion on such matters, something which I find to be of utmost importance.

There are many qualities that a leader should have, but given our current situation, I think these five stand out as the most important: (a) broad experience; (b) visionary; (c) doer; (d) dynamic; and, (e) eager to serve. Let me explain why each of these is so important.

**Broad experience.** Given that so many people in our community are undergoing hard times (in terms of finding meaningful work which pays sufficiently to be able to afford basic necessities, including, nutritious food, adequate shelter, and health care/insurance), it is imperative that we have a leader who understands what economic adversity means first hand. It is difficult to appreciate the frustration, hardship, and anguish that come with not being able to provide for your family, without having lived through it. If a mayor has endured (and assumedly prevailed over) economic adversity in the past, this person will be much better able to respond as it arises in our community. They will be able to talk more confidently and directly with those who are suffering right now. And they will be able to consider in clearer terms the gravity of the situation and the need for durable and meaningful responses.

**Visionary.** Since we aren't going to solve many of our problems using the same instruments that brought us into this mess, we need leaders that have new ideas and are willing to try new things in order to right this ship. It will take someone who isn't afraid to envision a better Galesburg, one that will likely draw from a much wider spectrum of local folk than our current representatives do. There is an incredible amount of talent, knowledge, and inspiration in this city and its neighboring surroundings. Yet few of these creative individuals feel empowered to make the kinds of contributions of which they are capable. If our future mayor has a vision characterized by more inclusiveness, these creative spirits would rise up and make themselves available and heard.

Part of being a visionary involves understanding the potential, as well as the limitations, of any political position. No mayor by himself/herself is going to come up with the solutions. It will be a team effort. It will require working closely with the city council. It will require working with small business folk. It will require working with faith based organizations as well as many not-for-profits. And it will require having a vision of a better future for **all** residents. A mayor that has the vision that every one of us truly matters will be the empowering leader that our community needs right now.

**Doer.** A vision is great but one has to be able to put words into action. Bureaucrats

are everywhere in politics and tremendous hurdles exist even to do the most mundane of things — such as planting a tree on one's premises or putting up solar panels on one's house. We need a leader that understands that many of the important tasks that are necessary to sustain us shouldn't take endless paper shuffling over years or involve lawyers (and undue expenses). I am not suggesting that we should desire a mayor that compromises safety for expediency but rather one that realizes how overly convoluted simple fixes have become. The government should encourage people to try innovative solutions not deter them.

**Dynamic.** These are unusual times. No one knows for sure what will happen. Thus it is imperative that a mayor be able to "roll with the punches" without becoming disoriented or overwhelmed. So, a mayor should have had at least a fair bit of practice dealing with changing environments. Environments undoubtedly change and communities do to. At this uncertain time, we need political representatives that are prepared to amend agendas as the conditions warrant. Fortunately, there are

many possible solutions and there are many people prepared to try them. Any starter set of solutions will require fine tuning and perhaps major readjustments. We need leaders that can recognize this and act accordingly.

**Eager to serve.** Lots of effort will be required of our new mayor. This isn't a job for the weak at heart or just a part timer. It is going to take someone fully committed to seeing things through. This will take someone who sees the mayor's position as a full time job (even though it isn't conceived, or paid, as one). This eagerness will express itself in the candidate's willingness to do the tough work before the election — walking/talking door to door, attending civic organizations, listening to citizens, etc. Be sure to notice who is really engaged with you.

So there you have it. Consider these characteristics when you support a candidate for mayor (or any local elective office). Create your own list and share it with others. Most of all, get engaged with the process. The election is just two months off and now is the time for more of us to be involved.