

Brentsville Supervisor Debate Highlights Distinctions between Candidates

Staff

by Val Wallace

More than 140 people filled Linton Hall School's gymnasium Tuesday night to hear the three candidates campaigning for Brentsville Magisterial District supervisor weigh in on several community issues, including the controversial Stone Haven proposed development in Bristow and the contested plan to build a bi-county parkway between Routes 66 and 50 to Dulles International Airport.

During the debate's two hours, Republican Jeanine Lawson, Democrat Eric Young and Independent Scott Jacobs responded to a series of questions on topics and issues that also included easing overcrowded classrooms, reducing local crime, handling residential and business zoning and development in the district's Rural Crescent and elsewhere in the district and county, increasing government transparency, cutting down on bureaucratic red tape and putting to best use county financial and economic resources.



The three candidates, Jeanine Lawson (R), Eric Young (D) and Scott Jacobs (I) debate Tuesday night Photo Credit: Mary Davidson, Potomac Local

Debate organizers Uriah Kiser, publisher of online publication Potomac Local, and Stacy Shaw, executive editor of Bristow Beat, gave candidates, each sitting in chairs equally spaced from each other on the gym stage overlooking the audience, two minutes to respond to questions and their campaign opponents one minute each to rebut.

"Let me be clear. I will vote against Stone Haven if I am elected," said Lawson when asked whether she would approve the development, which the Board of County Supervisors deferred a vote on until after the special election set on Dec. 23, when voters choose a replacement for former Brentsville supervisor Wally Covington (R).

Covington resigned from the seat in September to accept a newly created position as a Prince William County Courthouse judge, effective Jan. 1, 2015.

The Stone Haven development, spearheaded by local real estate firm RK Realty and development company EV Hunter Trust in Clifton, would bring 1,650 new homes along Devlin Road in the Brentsville area.

Hunter Trust has offered several million dollars in proffers that include a high school site on the proposed development's 10.4 acres, money to complete key access roads University Boulevard and Rollins Ford Road, land for ball parks and fields and possibly a site for a middle school. Stone Haven would also include a commercial and retail center.

Additionally, the developer's plans for Stone Haven include preserving open space and extending the network of nature and bike trails through Braemar and Victory lakes as well as extending sidewalks along Linton Hall Road and creating green buffers between different land uses and neighboring communities.

"Folks, don't be fooled by the proffer. Their high school site that they're offering, well, the 1,650 homes that come with it, what do you think that's going to do [to the school]? It's going to fill up," Lawson told the debate audience during her response.

"Stone Haven ... certainly doesn't pay for itself, and we have to stop approving residential development that is not paying for itself," she added.



Republican Jeanine Lawson. Photo Credit: Mary Davidson, Potomac Local

Young in his rebuttal also disapproved of the plan and said that he would not vote for it if elected.

"It looks on paper like it's a good use of land ... but the average value of the units [to be built] is simply not high enough to pay for the services that the residents are going to use," he said.

In his rebuttal, Jacobs, who has come under fire for accepting campaign contributions from real estate developers, stated his support for the development.

"Look, it's a lot of hassles. There is no denying that. It's also one of the largest tracks of land on this side of Prince William County that's ever been put together," he said.

"It offers one of the most aggressive proffer packages I've personally ever been witness to in all my years in business. It provides over a hundred acres of much-needed park land. It provides much-needed ball fields, a 13th high school," Jacob said.



Independent candidate Scott Jacobs. Photo Credit: Mary Davidson, Potomac Local

"It's a good project, and if we don't approve it, what we might end up with is three or four different projects, and we might not get those completed roadways and thoroughfares. We might not get that middle school. We might not get that high school site," he said.

Asked later whether he would approve Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) Bi-County Parkway proposal, which the Board of County Supervisors delayed a vote on last year to gather more information about the project, Jacobs said that Brentsville District needs a new route to reduce traffic congestion and to bring high-paying jobs to the area, but he believes the path of the proposed route should be reexamined.

"I would certainly be interested in looking at the Tri-County Parkway, but I don't think that necessarily means that we shouldn't continue to look at the Bi-County Parkway as well. I think that both may very well be needed. These things take a very, very long time to negotiate and to facilitate. If we start now, it might become a reality in seven to 10 years. Folks, we need to get started right now. We're way behind the curve," he said.

Young rebutted that he was also in favor of "creating connectivity" to Dulles.

“If we want Dulles Airport to be a part of our economic growth engine, we’ve got to tie into it somehow.”

But he said that he is not convinced yet that Bi-County Parkway is “the correct route, the best option.” He added that the Tri-County Parkway needs a second look as well.

Lawson was more specific in her rebuttal regarding what she does not like about the Bi-County Parkway.

“There has not been one study to prove that Bi-County Parkway will actually bring economic development,” she said. “Second, it cuts into the [National Manassas] Battlefield, a historic resource for our county.”

She said that she would suggest first putting “our limited resources” into the I-66 and Route 28 interchange.

“If you fix that or make a lot of improvements to that Route 28 interchange on the curve, that will alleviate a lot of that North-South traffic on 28,” she said.

During the debate, Lawson also expressed her opposition to “overzealous development” in Brentsville and the county.

“I am certainly not the developers’ candidate,” she said. “They deserve a seat at the table in the dialog of development, but they certainly don’t deserve to be the chair of the table of discussion.”

Young, who has said during his campaign that he has not and will not accept campaign donations from developers, told the audience when Kiser asked him why he feels strongly about such funds: “I feel like you need a stronger voice, somebody that represents purely your interests and nobody else’s. ... I’ve got to earn your trust if I’m voting on land use, and if I’ve got a stack of money in my campaign account from a developer, it sends the wrong message.”

Questions also included whether to extend a sewer line into the Rural Crescent and to change its zoning restriction of one home per 10 acres. Lawson and Young said that they were not in favor of extending sewer, nor in changing the zoning because it would risk damaging the area’s rural character. “We’ve got to preserve what we have left,” Young said.

Jacobs, though, said the law that created the Rural Crescent is ineffective.

“In 1998 when the Rural Crescent Act was created, it hoped to accomplish two objectives. One of those: to preserve the rural character of the area, and, two, to promote agriculture. I would argue today that it does neither,” he said. “We need to provide additional tools to the property owners in the rural area.”

People who attended the even said they enjoyed the debate and would like to see Bristow Beat and Potomac Local host joint political debates in the future.



Democrat Eric Young. Photo Credit: Mary Davidson, Potomac Local



The Linton Hall School Fife and Drum Corps perform before the debate. (Drummers shown here with their teacher.) Photo Credit: Mary Davidson, Potomac Local.

