

Candidates in Pittsford village criticize opponents in tense debate

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It was standing room only at Wednesday's candidate forum for the Pittsford village elections. / MEGAN DeMARCO//staff photographer

To vote

Polls will be open from noon to 9 p.m. Tuesday at Village Hall, 21 N. Main St.

PITTSFORD — The six candidates running for three village government seats drew battle lines at a forum Wednesday night in front of a boisterous standing-room-or-audience that

the moderator chastised twice.

More than 100 voters packed into Pittsford Sutherland High School for the hour-and-a-half debate moderated by the League of Women Voters. The candidates agreed on issues such as traffic-calming measures and the importance of not consolidating the village into the town, but that didn't stop them from taking shots at their opponents.

Mayor Bob Corby and his running mates, Lili Lanphear and Stacey Freed, portrayed themselves as significantly more experienced than opponents Trip Pierson, Leslie Buck and Chris Linares.

Lanphear criticized Linares and Buck for not attending many public meetings, and said campaign mail sent by her opponents was similar to a plan that Corby had put forth for the future of the village.

"I find it very interesting that some of the campaign literature I saw coming from our opponents here were actually lifted verbatim from the mayor's six-point plan," she said. "I found that rather dishonest."

On their side, mayoral candidate Pierson and trustee candidates Buck and Linares said Corby had been inconsistent on the 75 Monroe Ave. project, and said the current leadership had gotten the village into its current disagreement over the proposed apartment complex project.

"The people who were in charge let it get to a point where we have this completely inappropriate project," said Buck.

On the issue of experience, Linares, a senior executive at Hickey Freeman, said, "I don't think you should substitute experience with good judgment."

Pierson said he's running because he wants "open and honest leadership in the mayor's office."

But the most tense moment of the debate came when Pierson took a shot at Corby, eliciting a loud response from the audience.

“I’m not trying to convince people that I’m always right,” Pierson said. “I make as many mistakes as the next person, but I look to people who are experts. There’s a ton of people in this room who would be good mayors. He’s running because he doesn’t think anybody else is a good mayor except for him.”

At this, the crowd erupted into booing and applause, causing the moderator to intervene. In 20 years of moderating candidate forums, she said, she never had had to ask an audience to hold their reactions more than once.

The first half of the debate focused almost exclusively on the 75 Monroe Ave. project. Everyone running opposes it except for Pierson.

Corby said he was proud of the way the zoning code was written, to make sure the project fit aesthetically with the village.

“My position on 75 Monroe has been consistent since we started this project over four years ago,” he said.

Pierson said increasing the population of the village is positive for its business district.

Other than 75 Monroe, candidates were asked about traffic-calming measures, consolidation, and what their priorities would be if elected.

Freed, an editor at Remodeling Magazine, said she wants to use her writing experience to enhance communication among residents, such as videotaping village meetings.

“Bringing villagers’ ideas to the table is something that’s really important to me,” she said.