

Lovely Warren won't debate Alex White

Brian Sharp, Staff writer 4:44 p.m. EDT October 7, 2013



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In the race for Rochester mayor, it appears the time for debate has passed — at least as far as Democratic candidate Lovely Warren is concerned.

"Right now, for me, the best thing I have to concentrate on is going to the door, talking to the citizens of Rochester ... telling them what I stand for," Warren said.

That effectively keeps Green Party candidate Alex White off the stage.

"The only thing standing in the way of a debate happening is her," White said, claiming he has accepted every offer.

Warren and White met at three neighborhood forums during the primary campaign, when the focus was on Warren and Mayor Thomas Richards. White was not invited to either of the televised debates hosted by Voice of the Voter, a media partnership including the *Democratic and Chronicle*, and the League of Women Voters/WROC-TV.

Both organizations offered to host another debate for the general election campaign. White accepted. Warren's campaign declined.

In an interview, Warren noted she also has met with editorial boards and others. Warren and Richards squared off without White before the Rochester Rotary.

Warren bested Richards in the Sept. 10 primary. Polling at the time had shown Richards with a sizable lead, and White with little name recognition. In the wake of that election, her campaign spokeswoman had said Warren would debate again.

White thought he had a commitment for an Oct. 30 debate involving the League of Women Voters. But the League said Warren never signed on.

"We had hoped, and we had spoken about it many times," said Georgia DeGregorio, spokeswoman for the League. "To be honest, we are very disappointed because we feel the public loses when we don't have a continued conversation about issues that affect us locally."

With four weeks remaining until Election Day, Warren said she continues to campaign but is "not going to get bogged down" with another series of debates.

"I haven't seen, and I haven't talked to — my people haven't talked to me about — any debates," Warren said Wednesday.

The Rochester Regional Community Design Center said Warren called personally to decline their invite that same day. White accepted.

Joni Monroe, the center's executive director, said the format was not a debate but a "community conversation" in which a group of design professionals craft questions that are given to candidates in advance, and audience members submit questions during the program. The same was done during the 2011 special election, and Monroe said the plan was to have this be a regular part of elections going forward. Now, the group is talking about how to proceed.

"It is unfortunate," Monroe said. "It certainly is easier when both candidates, or how ever many are involved, agree to participate," she said. Without Warren, "It creates a very awkward situation."

Richards is still on the ballot for the Nov. 5 election on two third-party lines but has withdrawn from the campaign.

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