

## RECLAIMING THE MISSION Shannon Burns

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Beyond enjoying it, most of us don't think about the wonderful bounty of Forest Preserve land that we have in DuPage County. Twelve percent of DuPage County is protected Forest Preserve land. And 50% of this space is located in District 6!

In fact, the Forest Preserve District – and the Forest Preserve Board – play a large part in County Government. But, in part because people don't realize that the District is an integral part of the County system, there are problems with the District and the Board that could have a far-reaching, negative impact on the open space that we enjoy today.

I have been attending Forest Preserve Board meetings for over 18 months. As a result, I can summarize District issues into four main problems areas: Mission, Accountability, Money, and Ethics.

Under the current Board's leadership, the District has lost site of its Mission. Evidence of this is obvious: Planning to build a Maintenance Garage within 200 feet of the McKee Marsh is just one example. Under the current Board's leadership, the District has not been accountable to the public: Taking up to one year to approve meeting minutes does not speak to open government. No-bid contracts of up to \$350,000 are not good business. Failure to discuss a responsible bidder ordinance, after months of promising to pass such an ordinance, does not foster public trust.

It's obvious that the Forest Preserve District spends too much money. More property tax dollars go to the Forest Preserve than to the County Board! No-bid contracts total hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. The current Board says that the District is fiscally sound, with a AAA bond rating. This is true. But at what cost? Fiscal solvency based increasing property taxes in four of the last eight years is not genuine fiscal stewardship.

In spite of a 1992 Ordinance that requires the Board to have an ethics review mechanism in place, there has never been an ethics committee and criteria for ethical decisions do not exist. Such a review committee might have said no to the automatic three percent annual pay increases for the current Board.

These reasons alone are enough to argue for change in leadership at the Forest Preserve Board. But there's another compelling reason to vote for me as Forest Preserve Board Commissioner in District 6: DEMOCRACY. America differs from dictatorships because the Country is founded on choice. When there is no

choice – as there has not been in over 20 years for the position of Forest Preserve Commissioner in District 6 – there is no genuine Democracy.

Change is not easy - but most people understand that change is necessary and good. When I talk to voters – from both parties - they agree. In fact, while canvassing recently, I ran into a Republican precinct committeeman who was also canvassing. Even he agrees! He told me that “single party politics are never good and that the Forest Preserve needs a fresh approach”.

My opponent is a 20-year veteran on the Forest Preserve Board; he should be appreciated for his service. Now, it's time to move forward and I'm ready for the job: In addition to attending Board meetings, I've been canvassing for 14 months, and meeting with District 6 residents to hear their concerns. I completed the Morton Arboretum's 100+ hour Woodland Steward certification program. Once elected, I plan to take specific and concrete action to begin addressing the problems I see within the Forest Preserve District. I will publically post my voting record. I will host regular meetings with the community. I will do whatever it takes to form an ethics committee. I will not support unsubstantiated budget increases and I will work hard to form intergovernmental relationships that will save tax dollars. I will develop relationships with organized labor and work to adopt a responsible bidder ordinance. You can be sure that a vote for me is a vote for the future of the Forest Preserve!