

Seidle: County and city must cooperate

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R.E. "Mike" Seidle, a candidate for the Reed Creek District seat on the Henry County Board of Supervisors in the Nov. 6 election, envisions Martinsville and Henry County working for their common good.

"Being an optimist, I see a community possibly called 'Henmar,' a thriving community that has realized one can live cheaper than two," Seidle said.

Seidle, an engineer at Pine Products, served two four-year terms on the board before Andy Parker won the seat in 2003.

During Seidle's tenure on the board, he supported combining county and city departments when feasible. However, he said the word "merger" is not in his vocabulary.

His vision for the future is that "the county and the city should consider themselves a (single) community, working together to give residents the very best services" possible.

"If that means combining some operations," the two governments must "sit down at the table ... like business people" in an effort to end up "with the best available product or service," he said.

The key to accomplishing that lies in getting the facts, deciding on an option and planning to bring it to fruition, he said.

"The biggest strength I have is my quest for facts," Seidle said, adding that is what he brings to the table as a supervisor. He asked so many questions when he was a youngster that "my father said we should have nicknamed you 'Why' instead of Mike."

All aspects of problems or projects must be examined, Seidle said.

"Get all the information you can about the situation and make sure no hidden agendas are being satisfied. Make doubly sure the proposal will continue to be advantageous as it is presented," he said.

After all the facts are weighed and a project approved by a majority vote, he said, officials should work together to implement it, whether they supported the idea or not.

"I have my ideas" and others have theirs, Seidle said. However, once a path is approved, "get on with the program" and work together.

That is particularly true when creating jobs, which requires a joint effort as well as input from residents, he said.

“Job creation is the challenge,” Seidle said, but the community has the resources to make it happen.

The county is in the process of buying two tracts of land, with a combined total of about 1,800 acres, to be earmarked for industry, and site development at those areas must begin immediately, he said.

Officials must continue working to acquire other areas for future development, possibly near the Blue Ridge Airport, Seidle said.

The properties “need to have utilities run to them,” he said, as well as grading and other site preparation work to be in a “go condition. Be ready. Don’t wait ’til the train gets to the station to run the track,” Seidle said.

A source of funding to develop those sites also must be identified, he said.

“In this community, we have the resources to overcome or prepare to meet the deadlines of establishing industrial facilities. We have the labor force, and we have the ingenuity to provide and produce,” he said.

Financial resources include The Harvest Foundation, with funds that can be tapped to prepare for industry which in turn will create jobs. The Harvest Foundation recently provided funds to build a sports area in uptown Martinsville and a soccer complex off Virginia 650.

However, “instead of being given a sports facility, why not use those funds to prepare for jobs,” Seidle said. “I like sports as good as anyone, but the welfare of my family comes first.”

That includes providing necessities such as a home, “food and clothes,” he said, but equally important “is not having to spend excess money and lose family time” because of a long commute to work.

Building Interstate 73 will take years. In the meantime, “our area has to carry on aggressively until or when the I-73 ribbon is cut,” he said.

Therefore, he believes “a great investment could be made by the community and the Harvest Foundation” by building a new access road for the Patriot Centre that would end “on the (U.S.) 220 bypass,” Seidle said.

He added the section he is proposing “would be very similar to” a change to the I-73 route proposed by county businessman Max Kendall.

Seidle also said he believes the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp. should create two additional seats on the board: one for a member of the board of supervisors and another for a member of city council.

That would allow for more representation for the public, he said.

Seidle also supports education and a combined school system, “with the savings put into the education process” and earmarked to expand course offerings. However, “this decision is not up to the board of supervisors or city council, but to the school boards,” he said.

Patrick Henry Community College is an important component in the community, not only “as an apparatus for furthering education” but also providing work-force training, he said.

Seidle said he is not “that familiar with the New College Institute,” and he recalls thinking “it was an overlap of PHCC” when he first heard about it.

“I still wonder why it is not part of PHCC,” Seidle said. “With the New College offering grants as they do, I wonder if it is being accepted as it was first thought.”

The National College also is an enigma to Seidle, but “it has been here a long time and it is expanding, so it has to be supplying a need of the county and city,” he said.

While Seidle realizes his vision of the area’s future “probably goes beyond” a four-year term on the board of supervisors, “it will happen,” Seidle said. “We are a (single) community. ... Let’s get together and make things work.”

Tommy Slaughter also is running for the Reed Creek District seat. He did not return calls for comment.