

Austin mayoral race has a little bit of everything

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The race for Austin's next mayor has something for everyone. Political experience will go up against life experience in Tuesday's primary election.

Five candidates are vying for a spot in the general election in hopes of being elected. They include the current mayor, a city council member, a former city council member and Mower County Board member, a retiree and a McDonald's employee.

One key point voters should note is that this next mayoral term will be four years, rather than the previous two-year terms.

Marian Clennon was the first candidate to throw her name in the ring. She chose to not seek re-election to her 3rd Ward Austin City Council seat. She will finish her first term as a city council member at the end of the year. She also ran for mayor in 2010 but was defeated by Stiehm.

She said she has learned a lot in her two years on the council. Sometimes after a tough night at council meetings, strangers would call Clennon the next day and tell her they agreed with what she said.

"And that's what makes it all worth while," Clennon said. "When you have a total stranger call you and support you, then you know you're doing a good job."

Retiree Jerald Kelly has lived in Austin for 85 years and he had one reason for his mayoral run: He was mad about a bridge along Oakland Avenue that was removed a couple years ago. He even spoke to the city council in 2007, criticizing it for supporting plans to demolish the Oakland Avenue underpass bridges.

"The city went ahead and buried that bridge," Kelly said. "I think there could be other things done for the city of Austin. And I hope that I could bring something else into the city of Austin."

This is his first venture into politics. He said he loves Austin and he's running for the people; he wants their ideas.

Local businessman Dick Lang has held public office in the past and also made a run for mayor in 1994, when he lost to John O'Rourke. More recently, Lang served eight years on the Mower County Board and sought re-election in 2010 but lost to Tony Bennett.

Lang is a lifelong Austin resident from the city's East Side. He owns Bobee Jo's Bar and has been in business for 52 years. Taxes and flood plans are two of the key issues Lang will look at if elected.

"Our flood plans need to get moving in high gear," Lang said. "The money is there. Why are we dragging our feet? Let's get going before we are up to our ears in floodwaters again. I'll push this very aggressively."

Joey Miller is a LeRoy-Ostrander High School graduate and is originally from the area. He's lived in Austin since fall and works as a cashier at the McDonald's on Oakland Avenue in Austin. One of the biggest concerns for Miller is bringing more jobs to town. After the primary, he said, he will talk to small business owners about how they can be helped to hire more workers.

Recently, Miller has been vocal about voting "no" on the marriage amendment. He spoke about the issue in front of the Austin City Council at its meeting Monday. He said he "didn't want to be known as a gay 21-year-old" when he filed for office (he is now 22), instead he wanted to be a voice for Austin.

He called on the council members to move on the issue of the marriage amendment.

"As a city, we can talk about it and vote against this bad amendment," Miller said.

The candidate with perhaps the most experience on his side is Tom Stiehm, since he already knows what the job of being the city's mayor involves. He has been Austin's mayor since he was elected in 2006, winning successive terms since then.

He said he thinks the council is a good team and he enjoys being mayor. He just wants to keep it going.

"Things are going good in town," Stiehm said. "Things are expanding, we're growing."