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Candidates discuss key issues

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Candidates for the Lewisville City Council weighed in on key concerns facing residents just days before Saturday's election.

Mayor Dean Ueckert is running for re-election against challenger Winston Edmondson. Incumbent Neil Ferguson, Place 2 city councilman, is running against challenger Steve Hill. All candidates were given one week to answer the questions. The Leader received responses from everyone except Ueckert prior to the deadline.

Election Day is Saturday. Polling locations include: the Lewisville Municipal Annex, 1197 W Main St.; Memorial Park Recreation Center, 1950-B S. Valley Pkwy. and Lewisville City Hall, 151 W Church St.

The Leader compiled a questionnaire for candidates to complete:

1. What is your first priority if you are elected?

Winston: As soon as I'm elected, I'm going to initiate a community wide conversation. Citizens will know, right off the bat, that this isn't "business as usual." I want to immediately reach out to the Lewisville community and make it clear that, as mayor, I plan on being the voice of the people, and for that to work; I need to hear from them. I'd like to host a series of town hall meetings, and here's a novel idea...I'm going to listen to the people. This conversation is long overdue.

Ferguson: My first priority is water conservation. Despite recent rains, summer is coming and our growing population means greater demand. Citizens see Lake Lewisville and mistakenly assume we own the water. Even my opponent stated, "The lake is a big part of the town, and good indicator of how we are doing with water." This is not true. We must buy all of our water from Dallas Water Utilities. As the current councilman, I asked City staff to research water conservation options, including limits on large commercial users during mandatory drought restrictions. Drought control should fall equally on all users.

Hill: I will work to ensure that we fund the city's basic needs of fire, police, roads, parks and water and work to limit spending outside of that. I will favor paying down the city debt, and build a surplus that can be used in the future instead of taking on bond debt.

2. What is your vision for Lewisville's future?

Winston: I'm glad to share my vision for Lewisville, but let me first say that what I feel is

even more important than my vision, is my ability and desire to create an environment where citizens know their ideas and concerns are welcome and wanted. In 2007, I built the World's Largest Suggestion Box right here in Old Town Lewisville. At my request, Mayor Carey proclaimed it Ideas & Innovation Day. The point I was making was that great ideas can come from anywhere. As Mayor, I'll make sure the people know I feel that way.

You can sum up my vision for Lewisville with one word. Community. The specific answer isn't as concise. I want to encourage startups and entrepreneurs to come to Lewisville. I want to promote our businesses in creative ways. I want to take steps to bring the fragmented communities to the table so we can exist as a single, strong community.

Ferguson: As a seated councilman, I recently voted to develop a 2025 plan discussed at the annual workshop. My vision for the future will draw on the input of a cross section of members, because I believe in not just making my own assumptions, but listening to others who have different views. Armed with this new plan, I will be prepared to set direction into the next decade. Water needs, the I-35 expansion, land use, city build out, smart economic development and redevelopment, our zoning code, job opportunities, neighborhood revitalization, code enforcement, and continued solid city management will all be factors.

Hill: I envision a Lewisville where citizens and businesses thrive together. I foresee the city has implemented ordinances that make sense and are actually enforced. Businesses stand on their own merits and do not require decades of tax abatement to want to come here.

3. How will you help promote business development within the city?

Winston: My background in media, both my radio show on CNN Radio 1190 AM, and the television content I produced for Time Warner Cable, make me particularly suited to promoting Lewisville businesses. In fact, I've had several Lewisville business owners on my radio show. The business owners provide valuable content, and I make it a point to brag on their successes. As Mayor, I'm going to create an online video series to do just that. With these filmed "Conversations with the Mayor", we'll put every brick & mortar business owner online with a promotional video.

Ferguson: Cities are very competitive, and vie for businesses to improve properties and create jobs. We are naïve in thinking every company will want to come to Lewisville just because we are a great place. Likewise, with little room for new development, we must make the very best and highest use of remaining land. But that also applies to redevelopment, which is vital to our future health. Successfully leading the City of Lewisville isn't about not spending money, but rather about spending it wisely. Be sure to visit ElectFerguson.com for more of my economic development plans and recommendations.

Hill: I would work with businesses that want to come to the city, to provide a level playing field and low tax model. I sat through a city council meeting in April where a business that was working with city staff to come to Lewisville was denied a variance and blocked from opening a business here. This business was not asking for tax abatements from the city, it would have been a net positive.

4. How would you address citizens' concerns about oil drilling?

Winston: Citizens will know, from day 1, that their concerns will be heard. I've committed

to having open office hours, at least twice a month, where citizens can visit with me to express their ideas and concerns, no appointment necessary. I will be the accessible mayor.

Ferguson: Regarding gas drilling: Even before being seated as Councilman, I had already addressed citizens' concerns while simultaneously making it possible for drillers to drill and leaseholders to receive royalties. I am the one candidate who has directly and positively affected protection of individual property values and public safety in Lewisville while allowing gas drilling to proceed in safe areas. In contrast, my opponent pushes a libertarian 'drill as long as a driller owns the land' policy that is destructive to neighborhoods. See ElectFerguson.com for the full story.

Hill: I would encourage citizens to get more information about gas drilling. There is a lot of false information out there. Last year the city council acted based on a study that stated even if there was no human activity or drilling in North Texas volatile organic compounds (VOCs) would still not meet the EPA required levels. Removing the gas and VOCs from the ground is the best way to clear the air.

5. What concerns, if any, do you have about gas drilling?

Winston: It's important to be cautious, and to continue to analyze the data. I'm confident that Claude King, our capable city manager, is doing just that.

Ferguson: I would require water conservation periods above voluntary levels also apply to gas well fracking. I also propose forbidding use of trucks to haul frack water during mandatory drought constraints (to bypass restrictions) because TxDOT found heavy frack truck traffic creates road damage far beyond what fees recoup. Drought restrictions also parallel ozone action days. Denton County can lose federal funding if we don't maintain clean air, and frack trucks make that worse. I also want improved VOC emission controls and 24/7 monitoring of VOCs, plus frequent testing of nearby water wells for possible contamination.

Hill: It is important that drilling companies work within the ordinances set by the city. That they implement the best safety practices, equipment and procedures to ensure safe operation in urban environments. As Americans, we should do whatever we can to be energy independent. It can be done very safely.

6. Do you believe that the DCTA has enough safety measures to protect your constituents from harm? If not, how would you go about resolving the issue?

Winston: It's regrettable that Lewisville pedestrians have been hit by trains. I haven't seen anything that indicates there weren't enough safety measures. When citizens ignore safety measures, accidents happen.

Ferguson: You can never have too many safety measures. However, what matters is public awareness. I feel DCTA went above and beyond in holding safety days. It is unfortunate there have been avoidable issues, but they aren't due to negligence on DCTA's part. As far as how I would resolve issues: Lewisville has no authority to implement any actions on its own on the DCTA line. This is exclusively the jurisdiction of DCTA, DART, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). While the City cooperates on changes at crossings and stations, we are otherwise only interested party with no jurisdictional authority.

Hill: It concerns me that we have had so many people/cars getting hit by the train. The loud whistle has been a problem as well. The process of changing the intersections as part of the quiet zone may help improve safety. I would be in favor of slowing the train as it passes through town.

7. Do you believe it should be illegal to drive a motor vehicle while using a cell phone? Why or why not?

Winston: Cell phone use while driving can be a distraction. Satisfying your BigMac craving while driving can be a distraction as well. Putting on makeup, fiddling with the gps navigation system, breaking up a fight between young siblings in the back seat...these are all distractions. There's no logical reason to single out cell phones. No, it shouldn't be illegal.

Ferguson: You will never outlaw having a conversation in a car. Drivers talked to passengers in cars long before cell phones. What is dangerously distracting is when drivers take their eyes off the road to dial, answer or hang up calls, check incoming caller ID's, do texting, or drop their handheld cell phone and then look for it -- all while the car is in motion.

For completely hands free dialing and conversation, I don't see an issue any more than we have with conversing with a passenger. Even that can be a distraction, but you won't outlaw talking in a car. We even have cars we talk to that help maintain our attention on the road. The failure to keep eyes on the road and hands on the wheel is the product of driver distraction. We have technology to avoid those distractions while using cell phones for conversation. However, I would rather see the state pass a uniform code to eliminate city to city confusion.

Hill: I do not think it should be illegal to use a cell phone while driving. I do not think that government needs to take over every decision in one's life. I think that people should be held responsible for their actions, if they cause an accident. People are free to make choices and responsible to suffer any consequences.

8. What are your thoughts when it comes to smoking in public restaurants and/or bars?

Winston: If citizens, on their own, put the measure on the ballot with a citizen referendum, I would support it. The city council shouldn't put it on the ballot. Why would they do that? There are restaurants that are far too generous with salt in their menu items. That's not healthy. Does the city council want to put a salt ordinance on the ballot? I think the free market can handle restaurant preferences, and if it's important enough to enough of the citizens, they can go for a referendum. The city council needs to stay out of it. For the record, I'm allergic to smoke, and prefer dining at restaurants that don't allow smoking. I reward those restaurants with my business.

Ferguson: Existing ordinances, from food storage to hand-washing to food temperatures to materials used to cover walls and floors are all designed to protect the patrons and staff. We already tell restaurants how they can and can't operate in the best public interest, primarily to protect community health. The Fort Worth Star Telegram's article "Smaller Texas Towns Lag on Smoking Ordinances" said, "Some cities take a more libertarian approach, with no smoking restrictions". My opponent supports this libertarian directive which supports businesses making their own rules on any issue. I at least want it put to a

public vote.

Hill: Bars, bowling alleys and restaurants are private businesses. It should be up to those private businesses to set their rules. I don't think that government should be forcing the public's views on private property owners. This is the entire reason for private property in the first place, to create a private place where the citizen has control. Main Event Bowling alley is smoke free -- people have a choice.

a. Do you support a smoke-free ordinance?

Ferguson: The Texas Restaurant Association is begging for a smoking ban to create a level playing field for all. Despite imaginary boundary lines and area ventilation systems in restaurants, cancer-causing smoke components, including odorless and invisible gasses, drift elsewhere. To protect patrons, children and restaurant staff from repeated and unsafe exposure to carcinogens, as Councilman I asked City staff to pursue a new no-smoking ordinance which will address food service establishments. Many, including State Representative Myra Crownover (R-Denton), also oppose the libertarian approach. Over 30 Texas cities have comprehensive smoke-free ordinances. Multiple follow-ups show restaurant revenues actually increase after enacting bans.

Hill: I do not support a smoke free ordinance as a decision made by the council. The council should not a decision to limit rights. I am no fan of smoking, I do not smoke but I will not let my personal preferences allow me to step on the private property rights of our citizens and business owners. However, if the citizens get enough signatures for a referendum, I would vote that such a decision be placed on the ballot and let the people decide.

9. What projects would you propose to bring more revenue to the city?

Winston: Lewisville has so much potential. We really could become a destination city. Events like the Municipality+Technology Symposium, and Smash the Gong show that I organized and hosted, bring visitors to Lewisville. I'd love to have some high profile conversations with business experts, or celebrities, at Vista Ridge Mall. People can come out and watch, and be reminded that they can actually shop at the mall. Or let's welcome some of the talented DFW standup comics, bands, and vocalists to any one of the venues we have in the city that can support a fun show like that. That includes the mall. Remember in the 80's when Tiffany used to give concerts at malls all across the country. We need to bring life back to Vista Ridge Mall. Let's get creative.

Ferguson: I-35 Expansion and best/ highest use of lake side properties can bring revitalization and enormous benefits to the City if played right. We should utilize a consultant to look across our inventory of available of commercial properties and buildings and to find potential opportunities in conjunction with best fit occupants for top return on investment and long-term viability, which will also attract other desirable tenants. I favor Railroad Park sporting events like Lone Star Shootout lacrosse tournament this November, which bring hotel stays and outside sales tax dollars, and successful events like 2011 Western Days entertainment that yielded \$1.3M benefit.

Hill: I want the city to focus on the business of the city, and make an environment where business can flourish. It seems that majority of the Council see revenue as a way to spend more. To me this is the wrong way to think. I believe there is much we can cut and spend

where it is needed. I believe businesses flourish best when the government stays out of the way. I want to put policies in place to bring business to Lewisville, which will bring income and people and ultimately more revenue to the city.

10. What kind of policies are you going to propose to the council?

Winston: As I stated earlier, I want Lewisville to be a single community. Of course we all have our own heritage and culture, and that's great. We can still come together as a community. What's stopping us? A communication barrier. I'm going to make the case that Lewisville needs to make English the official language. We can motivate the folks who do want to join our community to learn the language, and the folks who don't want to join our community will be motivated to move elsewhere. The communication barrier is like a wall. Some people are ok with a fragmented community, and people living in poverty behind that wall. I'm not. Declaring English the official language will help start the process of tearing that wall down.

Ferguson: Besides water conservation issues, I have been an outspoken proponent of replacing our current zoning structures with Specific Use Permits (SUPs) and form-based zoning yielding sustainable construction during my time on City Council. By contrast, my opponent has said nothing to indicate he is aware of or has any understanding of this formula to move Lewisville forward for the long term. I will continue to drive for these revisions and improvements to update our old zoning system and create the setting for healthy economic development and long-term growth. Please visit ElectFerguson.com for more details.

Hill: We have too many policies in place that seem to conflict with the spirit of the law or our ordinances. We should look at changes that will make things fairer for our citizens. I will propose policies that are about individual freedom and personal responsibility. I will propose policies that lower taxes, reduce our debt and ultimately create a budget surplus.

11. Where would you put most of the budget and why?

Winston: I want to make sure that our police and fire departments have absolutely everything they need, and that our roads and infrastructure are sound, and wouldn't it be great to pay off some debt? As mayor, I'm going to work hard to promote Lewisville businesses, because the additional sales tax revenue will help ensure all our bases are covered.

Ferguson: Public safety (fire and police) will always head the list. It is a factor of their critical importance to community safety and stability, their complexity, and their extensive reliance on equipment. Public services (streets, water, sewer, street lights, traffic controls and other utilities) come next as essential city services. Community development (including code enforcement, inspections, civil engineering, permitting), parks and leisure services (including facilities, maintenance, programs) and economic development (new and expanding business opportunities) all come next. These three categories are essential to healthy growth, desirable living conditions, quality of life, and a robust future.

Hill: The majority of the budget is for police, fire, roads. The key is to spend money where we need to spend it. I think we need more police officers on the streets and that does require an increase budget but it should not take away from another essential function. I would put the majority of the cities' budget toward the essential functions of the city. I

would ensure the recent sales tax increase, approved by the voters, is used toward its intended purpose of fire and police. My priorities are fire, police, roads, parks and water. We should focus on eliminating unnecessary spending.

12. In your opinion, is urban decay an issue in Lewisville?

Winston: It is an issue. Breaking down the communication barrier in a way that encourages legal residents to learn English, and illegal aliens to move elsewhere, will help solve the problem. I've spoken with the Rosetta Stone language learning company, and we might be able to get language learning assistance for those areas of the community at no cost to the city.

We also need to be strategic in our revitalization efforts. As mayor, I'll continue to encourage the formation of a new Technology Startup Accelerator in Old Town Lewisville. Think of it as Startup School. Teams of entrepreneurs, with fresh funding provided by the accelerator, would be in Old Town every day of the week. Eating lunch here. Meeting our existing Old Town business owners. The creative energy that they would bring to the city is invaluable. It's a foundation we could build on.

Ferguson: By definition, we do not have urban decay. Urban decay is classically characterized by high unemployment, high poverty rates, population decline, large loss of businesses, threatened safety, extensive abandoned and unusable structures, totally blighted urban areas, and piles of rubble. It typically looks like a post-war zone. Think of large areas in cities like Detroit, Flint, Newark, Baltimore, and Atlanta. We have nothing like this. We do have some localized neighborhood decline, but that should never be confused with urban decay, and the solutions are different. By comparison, Lewisville has high employment, increasing business development, excellent safety, and population growth.

Hill: Urban decay is an issue in Lewisville. I serve on the community development block grant (CDBG) advisory committee. This is a HUD program that returns some of our federal tax dollars with strings attached. The original intent of the program was to end urban decay. Ignoring violations only makes the problem worse and delays an ultimate resolution to the problems.

a. If so, what specific measures would you take to improve/fix the issue?

Ferguson: Since we don't have it, urban decay resolution measures aren't applicable. To the extent that we have neighborhood code and revitalization issues, the first line of defense is code enforcement. However, that accomplishes nothing if you are trying to force an elderly or indigent person or family to make repairs on a limited fixed income that can't pay their medical bills. Threatening with citations or possible condemnation isn't going to make them produce money. This is where we benefit tremendously from help provided by outside agencies, and where CDBG funds thankfully have and will continue to make a positive impact.

Hill: The main thing we need to do is enforce the ordinances we have already. The point of making ordinances is to enforce standards and rules. I would have code enforcement be more aggressive in going after code violations, and have police work together with the code enforcement officers.

b. What areas of Lewisville are most in need of improvement?

Ferguson: I can find something in every part of town that could be improved, from little strip centers that need to be renovated and/or fully leased out to a house most any neighborhood that has some code violation. With healthy economic development, you also get improved residential improvement and increased single family housing demand. Regarding what specific area has the most ongoing code enforcement issues, City records verify it is on the west side of I-35 between Main and Bellaire. This area is heavily residential and exhibits recurring problems, placing it at the top of the improvement list.

Hill: The areas around Old Town seem to be the worst. There are houses that have roof repairs going on for years. There are houses with multiple families living in a single family home, with 6 or more cars parked there regularly. Houses in disrepair and filled with storage buildings (some with people living in the storage building).

c. What ordinances, if any, would you add to prevent further urban decay?

Ferguson: Not urban decay, but revitalization: Many apparent code violations are actually legal non-conforming -- "grandfathered". There are also many where it cannot be proven whether they are grandfathered or not because no one knows when they started. In both cases, the City has no power to take action. For the remainder of issues, once I and other Councilmen are presented the new budget and it is approved, two new code enforcement officers can be hired, bringing the total to seven. This will reduce the case load per officer, making each one more effective in a given zone.

Hill: I would enforce the ordinances we have now. Measure the effect of enforcement and then look at adding or removing ordinances, if needed.

13. How important is the constituents' understanding of city council to you personally on a scale from one to 10 with 10 being highly important?

a. If it's a low number then why?

b. If it's a high number how will you inform them?

c. How will you let citizens in Lewisville know what is being said and/or dealt with in city council?

Winston: It's a 10. We're all stakeholders, and everybody needs to be involved and engaged. First, let's remove the barriers. Why does the city council meet on the same day as the school board meeting? That's ridiculous. Citizens shouldn't have to choose one or the other. I'll encourage a schedule shift.

Additionally, the business of the city doesn't have to be boring. It's really pretty exciting. I'd love for citizens to come to council meetings, but if we're serious about getting citizens involved, we're going to have to take the show on the road. I'm not talking about mobile city council meetings. We can make those town hall discussions more of a regularly occurring event. We can have problem solving workshops, like the Strategic Design Team I participated in for LISD. Let's be creative. Let's think big. Let's get excited about the city of Lewisville.

Ferguson: Obviously a 10. Citizen involvement begins with understanding our City

government. Citizens should know what is being done with their taxes, what strategic plans are being formulated, and how existing and potential problems are being addressed. An informed and engaged populace makes Lewisville's government stronger. A low level of participation can result in misunderstanding, distrust, and ill-prepared candidates and/or placeholders that make bad decisions for our city. City Council meetings are now available on YouTube. Lewisville should also post Council workshops there, too. I also have a history of meeting with neighborhood groups on important concerns, which I will continue.

Hill: I think people need to know what is going on in the city. Too much is hidden, in workshops and retreats.

I would film the workshops and retreats and make that available online and via the cable channel.

I would use the city's website to communicate what is happening. I would like to see a sign up where people can receive notices of upcoming events. Also, I would communicate with the various clubs and organizations what events and issues are coming up so that they can communicate to their members.

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