

Six seek openings on Nipomo Community Services District board

By April Charlton/Staff Writer

Six candidates are vying to fill three openings on the Nipomo Community Services District board, which will go before voters Nov. 7. Incumbents Larry Vierheilig and Cliff Trotter are facing challengers Thomas Novak, Jesse Hill, Bob Blair and Jim Harrison.

Director Judith Wirsing is not seeking another term.

The newly-elected directors, who will be in charge of managing Nipomo's water and sewer services, will start their four-year term Dec. 1.

Name:

Robert L. "Bob" Blair

Age: 72

Occupation: Pharmacist

Hometown: Rural Arroyo Grande (inside NCSD sphere of influence)

How will the community benefit from your presence on NCSD?

From my 10 years experience as a past board member. I have also helped pump septic tanks, video-view sewer systems, clean major sewers and drains, worked with larger commercial hydro-flushers and assisted in drilling wells and other functions of water storage and water production. I bring knowledgeable, cost-effective leadership that has a proven track record of lower consumer rates and overall operating costs. I was the major driving force that changed NCSD from renter to owner status with the building of the present district office and community building.

What issue in your jurisdiction is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

The ratepayers and the general public are being misled by some of the current board members who claim that building a larger pipe for supplemental water from Santa Maria will induce growth and lead to the building of 7,000 homes and other problems.

A small 16-inch pipe will require three times as much energy and time to pump the same amount of water as a 30-inch pipe. In six to seven years, the saving in power and maintenance cost will pay for any additional construction costs and provide a facility that will not require an expensive update in the future. "Growth-inducing" is not in my vocabulary, but "cost-effective planning" is.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

Discharge the high-priced water lawsuit lawyers and water consultants that are costing the current ratepayers \$6 to \$7 a month on their current water bills and use that money to offset the cost of supplemental water and other operating costs. The expert hydrologist hired by NCSD testified that not only is Nipomo not overdrafting the groundwater but that if NCSD and Santa Maria pumped water at

the 2030 level and it never rained a drop, we would still not run out of water or have sea water intrusion. That is just the opposite of the result that was expected when those people were hired by the district to represent them in the lawsuit.

Name: James "Jim" Harrison

Age: 62

Occupation: Retired fire division chief

Hometown: Nipomo

How will the community benefit from your presence on NCSD?

I have 37 years of public service as a firefighter for Santa Barbara County. During that time, as a manager in a department with more than 200 employees, I assisted in the creation and management of a \$34-million budget. I managed day-to-day operations of emergency responders and was involved with planning, initiation, implementation and supervision of major fire attack plans and acted as a liaison with state, local and federal agencies during emergencies and nonemergency situations.

I have been a director on the South County Advisory Council for two years, and many of the issues facing NCSD are identical to those addressed by SCAC.

That broad range of experience, combined with my commitment to this community, willingness to cooperate, honesty and integrity, will allow me to make the tough decisions NCSD will face over the next few years.

What issue in your jurisdiction is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

The key issue is the failure of the county to provide the infrastructure that is needed for the growth it has allowed in Nipomo. We are consuming the natural resources faster than they can be replaced.

The county needs to be apprised of the consequences of its decisions regarding permitting more growth. NCSD and the county need to work together to ensure there are enough resources for current residents before allowing more growth.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

I would leave the budget as it is. It is a very prudent budget, with adequate reserves for emergencies and funded replacement for capital equipment.

It is the fiduciary responsibility of each director to closely monitor the budget and NCSD spending and make changes when appropriate. I would recommend a survey to determine if there are more cost-efficient ways to complete the required operations.

Name: Jesse Hill

Age: 52

Occupation: Attorney

Hometown: Nipomo

How will the community benefit from your presence on NCSD?

Hopefully, some of the knowledge I have gained while working on the groundwater basin for the past seven years will be of use in making future groundwater management decisions. As one of the three landowner attorney authors of the settlement agreement, I am in a unique position to explain why we came to the amount of water that should be brought into the hydrologic subarea. That thinking will directly affect rates. I would like to make sure the rate increase is kept to a minimum.

What issue in your jurisdiction is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

I am concerned that NCSD is setting rates and charges without thinking through the practical implications of projects and is now charging commercial projects, farmers and poorer residents more for water than other residential users. That is unfair to businesses and the most vulnerable, and I would make it a priority to reverse that trend.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

I would closely scrutinize how the capacity charge was determined.

If the traffic and circulation numbers are correct, there are 5,000 homes to be built under current zoning in the South County. If 1,000 are from The Woodlands and 1,000 are outside Nipomo, then there are 3,000 residential units.

If there is a \$12,000 supplemental water charge per unit, then there is \$36 million to be collected without the additional funding from commercial or mixed-use projects. The cost of the pipeline is, at most, projected to be \$10 million, with funding of \$2 million from The Woodlands and state money.

I would work to see that current projects are not being overcharged, but are being fairly charged to pay for the pipeline. "Smart growth" projects are being charged for fire flow capacity as if it were fixture flow. That makes no sense and is bad planning for a walkable and nice-looking downtown.

Name: Thomas Novak

Age: n/a

Occupation: Retired educator

Hometown: Blacklake

How will the community benefit from your presence on NCSD?

Nipomo will benefit from the 35 years of educational leadership and management skills that I possess. I think being a new director on the NCSD board will bring fresh insights and thoughtful questions to the pressing problems of water for Nipomo's future.

What issue in your jurisdiction is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

I believe any community problems can be resolved through education and information to all ratepayers. My forte is in developing long-range strategic planning in NCSD. My consensus-building and problem-solving skills can benefit NCSD in the difficult and important decisions that lie ahead.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

Any non-cost-effective, long-term, maintenance and operations that are not part of the long-term strategic planning should be fixed.

Name: Cliff Trotter

Age: 79

Occupation: Incumbent/retired engineer

Hometown: Blacklake

How will the community benefit from your presence?

My experience is gained from a 35-year work history as engineer and manager of water districts in the San Joaquin Valley, including almost 30 years as engineer/manager of the 132,000-acre Arvin-Edison Water District, which includes two towns larger than NCSD.

I have five and a half years as a director on the NCSD board and am currently chairman of the committee overseeing the design and construction of the Santa Maria-NCSD supplemental water intertie.

I am also a six-year resident of Blacklake, advisor to the Blacklake Town Council and also chairman of the NCSD parks committee, which is studying the possibility of building and maintaining small parks within NCSD.

What issue is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

Much of the NCSD infrastructure is badly lacking in maintenance and in funding of that maintenance. I have and will continue to lobby to provide funding and personnel to repair and upgrade certain district facilities. The area is also in desperate need of supplemental water to overcome the worrisome overdraft of the aquifer underlying Nipomo and adjacent areas; I am part of an NCSD board effort to remedy that situation.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

Nothing. Quite the contrary. As alluded to, maintenance and the upgrading of district facilities is lacking and must be provided for.

Name: Larry Vierheilig

Age: 66

Occupation: Retired

Hometown: Nipomo

How will the community benefit from your presence on NCSD?

I use a pragmatic and fair approach regarding decision making on issues, projects and business before the NCSD board. All sides are heard without prejudice, and my decisions will be based on, "Given the facts and cost, what can be done?" and "What is the greatest benefit to the ratepayers and community at large?"

What issue in your jurisdiction is hindering the community and how do you plan to change it?

There are many issues that hinder the community. Put together, they boil down to lack of local control regarding such public facilities as parks, recreation, a community center, the library, etc., and infrastructure (traffic and circulation) and development, to name a few.

My goal, in conjunction with the ratepayers and community, is to develop a strategic plan and set of goals for the district identifying where it needs to be in three years, five years and 10 years and what we need to do to achieve those goals.

If you had a red pen and could cut one thing out of the budget, what would it be?

If I could delete one item from the district's budget, it would be the money budgeted and spent on the ongoing groundwater litigation. Unfortunately, that item won't be resolved until the judge issues his final decision and no other party appeals the ruling. Until that final decision is issued and no other party appeals, I am unable to take a red pen and cross out that line item. Drat!