

Mayoral hopefuls off and running in Greensboro

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GREENSBORO — Campaign season is more than three weeks away, but Greensboro's mayoral hopefuls have wasted no time declaring their candidacy.

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On the heels of Mayor Yvonne Johnson's re-election campaign kick-off last week, former City Council candidate Bill Knight announced Wednesday he will take on the incumbent mayor.

Both candidates have indicated that jobs, economic development and fiscal responsibility will be key issues this election season.

Neither has fully fleshed out plans. But there is already some excitement about a contested mayoral race.

"I like the idea of competition. It's healthy," said Julie Lapham, who ran Johnson's last campaign. "It means people have to give it some thought."

Knight announced his candidacy Wednesday afternoon. The retired accountant said his "Go Forward Greensboro" campaign will focus on the issues, such as public safety and accountability in government.

"I will effectively represent all residents of Greensboro," he said.

But he declined to give his take on specific issues, such as the reopening of the White Street Landfill or water rate increases, until after he files to run with the board of elections next month. Candidate filing begins July 6.

Johnson became the city's first African American mayor in 2007, beating challenger Milton Kern by about 4,700 votes.

Since then, she has led an embattled City Council that has kept taxes flat and ousted the city manager against Johnson's recommendation.

Knight came in last place among the at-large council candidates in 2007, after doing well in the primaries.

He has remained vocal about local problems, calling on the City Council to apologize to former police Chief David Wray for failing to stand behind him and asking pointed questions about city finances.

His fiscally conservative leanings will play well with some voters.

"Bill will run the city in a much more conservative way," said Tony Wilkins of the Guilford County Republican Party.

Johnson's supporters said her strength lays in her ability to make disparate people feel like they are included, a point reiterated by many of her supporters at her kick-off celebration at the coliseum.

"She listens to everybody, not just the special interests," Lapham said. "It's seldom you find someone like that in politics."

Both candidates might have an uphill battle in what politicians say is shaping up to be a difficult campaign fundraising year. Beating an incumbent can be tough, but having cash can help.

Johnson raised about \$94,000 in contributions in her last campaign. Knight raised about \$18,000 when he ran at-large.

Knight declined to say how much he thinks he can raise, but political consultant Bill Burckley, who is working with Knight and other council candidates, said he's got a plan.

"It will an uphill battle, but it's doable," Burckley said.

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