

Three vying for mayor of village of Ashley

By Dillon Davis

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Three candidates are vying to serve as the mayor of the village of Ashley as voters prepare to head to the polls on Nov. 7. Longtime Mayor Jim Nelson is again seeking reelection, and he is being challenged by two newcomers in David Lockhart and Greg Floyd. Each candidate spoke with The Gazette to highlight why they're running and what they want to see in the village if ultimately elected.

Nelson

Nelson has served as mayor of Ashley since 2008 when he was appointed to fulfill former Mayor John Davis' term after he resigned. He has since been reelected three times and is now running for a fourth full term.

With the exception of an eight-year period when he served in the military, both Nelson and his wife have been lifelong residents of Ashley. Once a security officer for the Delaware County Bank, Nelson felt he had some financial knowledge and wanted to work for the community, which ultimately led him to take on the mayoral role.

At the time of Nelson's appointment, Ashley was in the midst of a financial crisis in which it was unable to pay its bills. Through various cuts and changes, as well as declining to take a salary for a year following his appointment, Nelson said the village began to dig itself out of the hole he inherited.

Asked what he's most proud of during his time as mayor, Nelson cited intersection improvements within the village as well as moving the village's offices to the remodeled firehouse. He also said the village water system, which is at least 80 years old, has been redone in parts as the funds became available on a very tight budget.

"The village is very limited in the income it gets because we don't have a lot of businesses and we don't have a large tax base," Nelson said. "Ashley is an older community. A lot of people are on retirement or social security and can't afford or won't support levies or tax increases in the village, so it kind of handcuffs us.

"An example is the police department. The last two times we put an operating levy on the ballot, it's been defeated because people tell us they don't want to have a police department; they'd like the sheriff's office to take it over. Right now, we're supporting the police department through our General Fund, and you can't keep doing that because, after a while,

you're using more money than you're taking in. So we have to be very frugal with how we spend our money in the village.”

Should he be reelected, Nelson said he would like to continue seeing through the water system updates into its second phase. He added that the village, because of the Environmental Protection Agency's mandates, must seek out a loan to make improvements to the wastewater treatment plant.

“Those are two big things, and keep in mind that any kind of loan the village puts on is usually for 20-30 years, and that's quite a ways out,” he said. “So anything we put on, people are going to be indebted to for another 20-30 years.”

Nelson noted there are some “good things coming” to the village, including the Ashley gas station looking to build a new facility. “It's right in the middle of town and is going to be great for the village that they can see something new like that coming in,” he said.

Nelson added that he continue to stress the need for the village as a whole to clean up the community.

“There are a lot of vacated houses, a lot of junk cars that we've been working on (cleaning up),” he said. “It's hard for us to get that cleaned up because we have to get our lawyer involved, and they have to write a resolution or whatever to get people to do it. But this past year we've torn down three vacant properties in the village that are helping the aesthetics. Each year, we have a trash day where we pick up unwanted garbage that people won't throw out in their trash. In the last two years, we've cleaned up over 900 tires in the village.”

Lockhart

Lockhart was born and raised in Ashley and moved back to the village six years ago. He has served on the village council for the past three-and-a-half years after being appointed to fill a vacancy and currently has two years left on his elected term.

“Prior to my term on council, I was on the Board of Public Affairs, which is the Water Board, basically,” Lockhart said. “So I've been involved with the operations for more than five years, and I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of what works and what doesn't. I'm close enough to be involved in many layers, and I see what's broken and what needs fixed. I think I can improve upon the situation, and that's the only reason I'm running. I wouldn't be doing this otherwise.”

Lockhart said regardless of who is elected to serve as mayor, the village will still be facing the same problems it currently faces. He said those problems include personnel issues and figuring out how to hire and retain quality people.

“The village is not an extremely prosperous municipality, so we work on a tight budget,” he said. “We've got major infrastructure projects underway. We've improved the water supply

lines on the west side of town. The east side needs done because they're approximately 90 years old, so we need to improve those pipes. They're metal pipes, so they're corroded."

Lockhart said a project has been engineered for those improvements, but the village is still looking for funding to support it. He also noted the improvements to the wastewater treatment plant, for which the village has received funding and will need to be "managed in the short term."

"Major projects are underway," he said. "We have paving projects that need done. ODOT is wanting us to repave state Route 229 and incur the costs to do that ... That's expensive and costly. So those problems are going to be the same whether I'm elected mayor or it's one of the other two gentlemen.

"But I think I can improve the process. In my time on the council, I've spent a lot of time building relationships with outside agencies such as the Ohio EPA, Ohio Public Works Commission, and the Board of Development within the county. We also have a pretty good relationship with the Delaware Public Health District."

He added, "All of those things don't really help us on the day-to-day operations, but when you have a situation and you need to call someone, it's beneficial if you've built that bridge already."

Those relationships become increasingly important considering the village's lack of internal revenue and the reliance upon outside funding from agencies to make projects happen.

As for what he hears most often from residents about the changes they'd most like to see in the village, Lockhart said utility costs are a common thread. However, he noted the utility bills include an improvement fee for both water and sewer that help the village "build up a little bank" for when it applies for outside funding.

"What that does is help us so when we apply to these agencies, such as the Ohio EPA, for example, the in-kind money that we can show that we have available to add to the pot is a plus on that yardstick they use for (grant) scoring," he said. "So if we have some funds available for capital improvements within the village, that helps us on the scoring. And, unfortunately, that's a \$5-6 charge additionally for each of those two projects. Nobody wants to pay more than they have to, but we want to be able to have clean water coming out of the faucet and have water go away when you flush it. Those are just basic necessities that we're trying to provide to the village."

Lockhart noted getting residents to understand why those fees are important is part of an educational process, underscoring the need for more public involvement from residents.

"A lot of times, we operate in a vacuum and do not have a lot of public attendance at meetings," he said. "It's up to the council to make sure that we're representing the community

the best we can, and the best way to do that is to receive input. That is something I have plans to improve, whether as a councilman or as mayor.”

Lockhart went on to say that while he doesn't want to “toot my own horn,” he believes he's the most proactive member of the council with regard to building relationships with outside agencies and also in trying to generate community involvement and a better understanding of the role residents play in the village's future.

“I want to be more inclusive,” he said. “I think of the three candidates, my combination of expertise of knowing what's going on in the village coupled with my professional skills are kind of unique and a plus. That's nothing against the other two candidates. They're both fine people who also want what's best for the village. But I think I'm positioned overall in a more complementary fashion.”

Floyd

A 10-year resident of Ashley, Floyd said he's thought of running for some sort of elected office “for years,” whether it was on the school board or something of that nature. With five children, however, the timing was never right for him to pursue a position.

Now, as an empty nester, Floyd said he's been considering running for mayor for a couple of years in order to bring a fresh perspective to the village.

“We need a new set of eyes,” Floyd told The Gazette. “Things need to change. Things that don't seem to be getting done need to be done. Over the past couple of years of talking to people and a little bit of a nudge from some people who asked me if I would be interested in running when I was already thinking about it, that was kind of the push over the edge.”

Floyd said one of the issues he wants to look into should he be elected is the issue of speeding and the lack of tickets that are written in Ashley.

“We don't want to be a police state,” he said. “We don't want to be considered a speed trap. But we don't write very many tickets because we don't have our own court up here, and each offense that goes to court costs Ashley money if a ticket is written. I want to look into that. Why do we have to pay Delaware County without getting anything back? Delaware County treats Dublin, Delaware, and Powell like they're the golden children, and up here, we're the redheaded stepchild. I want to look at why we don't get the same benefits they get.”

Floyd noted the water issues existing in the village and the need for improvements to the water system, as well as the issues children in the village have in getting to the local pool as areas he would also like to address.

“There's no safe way for those children to traverse the road to be able to get there. These are things that have been going on for too long,” he said.

Of course, securing funding for projects is always a challenge in Ashley given its small, primarily residential tax base. But Floyd said there are always grants out there, and whether it be from a lack of knowledge or initiative, he doesn't feel the village is properly searching for that outside funding. Floyd added that he would not look to the community for additional revenue.

"I am worried about the rising taxes on the homes," he said. "We have a high amount of older, elderly people and a high amount of low-income people, and we're taxing them out of their homes. I don't want to raise taxes. I want to look at other funding avenues."

Floyd has worked in banking for 15 years, including the past 13 with Huntington Bank. Prior to entering the banking arena, he helped manage multiple restaurants. Every step of the way, Floyd said he's been successful at what he does, and he believes that will continue to be the case if he's elected.

"I know that once I get in there, get in the books, and take a look at them, I will do everything as ethically, honestly, and transparently as anyone. I will do the best job I possibly can," he said.

Asked what he's hearing from residents as he's campaigned, Floyd said the high number of speeders often comes up, as does a sense that residents' input isn't welcomed when they attend council meetings.

"I'll listen and welcome everything," he said. "Obviously, I wouldn't be able to please everybody and do everything, but I think hushing somebody is the last thing you should do when they're attending a council meeting."

Speaking on the issue of speeding and how it would best be addressed, Floyd said he believes the village not only needs to maintain its police department but also needs a larger police presence.

"One of the reasons people speed through is that we have two police officers here right now," he said. "They can't be in the four corners of the village at all times. We're even going to lose one of those officers, so we're going to be down to just the chief. And I know we have a drug problem up here, so we need more (officers), not less."

Currently, the police department is funded through the village's General Fund. In 2021, residents voted down a levy extension that funded the department, forcing it to downsize from four to two officers. It was again turned down by residents last year.

Floyd said that should he be elected, he will try to educate the community on why a levy and the subsequent increase in police presence are important in Ashley. Ultimately, though, Floyd said he won't push for anything the residents don't want to see.

He later added that integrity and transparency would be two cornerstones of his term, saying, “Everything I do will have sunlight on it, period.”

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Nelson



Lockhart



Floyd

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