

Bluffton Town Council candidates pledge support for May River, disagree on affordable housing

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The four candidates for two at-large Bluffton Town Council seats pledged to restore the May River while disagreeing on an affordable housing project at a forum Wednesday night at Town Hall.

About 40 people attended to question incumbents Fred Hamilton and Allyne Mitchell and challengers Karen Lavery and Ted Huffman, driving the hour-long debate into overtime.

The candidates used a 30-second rebuttal only twice in response to minute-long answers allowed by host organization, the League of Women Voters of Hilton Head Island/Bluffton Area. Both rebuttals involved Bluffton's affordable housing project that will build six cottages in old town.

Hamilton, a champion of the project, said residents have pushed for more affordable homeownership options for years, and the high-quality cottages will enhance a once-blighted area. Mitchell also supported the program.

Huffman said the town should not be in the affordable housing business.

"I've heard absolutely no support for this project," he said.

Lavery suggested a better program would be to purchase foreclosed homes, sell them at a low cost and use the proceeds to continue the effort.

All the candidates said they would take tough stances with developers to prevent further pollution of the May River.

They also made commitments to economic development. Lavery said council members should actively recruit businesses instead of waiting for companies to come to them.

Hamilton and Mitchell touted the accomplishments of the current town council, including strict stormwater management standards and a new zoning and development code designed to protect the watershed.