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Gloves come off early in Sandy mayoral debate

Civility suffers: The gravel pit issue remains the city's hottest subject

By Jacob Santini
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The top candidates

1 Tom Dolan, a three-term incumbent.

1 Gary Forbush, a member of Save Our Communities.

1 S. Drake Meyer, a certified public accountant. SANDY - Civility in Sandy's mayoral race appears to be gone.

The first debate of the campaign season - put on Thursday by the Sandy Chamber of Commerce - came complete with allegations of misconduct, misinformation and downright-dirty tricks.

What happened: A resident group was accused of baiting voters into signing referendum petitions; someone was accused of being a developer's pro-incumbent plant; a City Council member accused a candidate of duping voters with promises of a 107-acre park; and the president of the Chamber was accused of backing a candidate - something he could lose his title over.

All of those allegations came in a 10-minute span and none of the rhetoric was from the candidates.

That's not to say the debate between the three men seeking votes was tame either. After all the three were asked to focus on the future of the Sandy gravel pit, the hottest issue the city has seen in years.

The gravel-pit debate stems from a City Council vote that changed the zoning on the 107-acre parcel. The vote made way for The Boyer Co. to bring a Super Wal-Mart, Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse, a smattering of smaller shops and restaurants, plus 330 housing units.

But a group of residents - who believe the area at 9400 South and 1000 East is the wrong place for two big-box retailers - responded with a drive to take the issue to voters. They succeeded when the Utah Supreme Court ruled they had enough signatures to put the issue on November's ballot.

It was an early campaign slogan used by the resident group, Save Our Communities, that raised the most heat Thursday among the mayoral candidates.

In their initial attempt to convince the City Council to turn down The Boyer Co., Save Our Communities pushed a message that implied a park would come if the development were stopped.

Since then, the group has backed off that. They agree with city officials that Sandy doesn't have the money for a park. But Gary Forbush, a prominent member of the group and mayoral candidate, didn't say a park was out of the question.

Dolan did.

"If Mr. Forbush is elected, he's not going to make it [into] a park," Dolan said.

Later, he emphatically added: "No, it cannot be a park," a statement that launched the crowd into cheers.

Forbush responded that Dolan is trying to frighten voters into approving the City Council vote.

"It's a scare tactic," he said. "I think [if the City Council vote is reversed] this property will turn to another type of multiuse development that doesn't include the big boxes."

The third candidate, S. Drake Meyer, wasn't involved in much of the question-and-answer period that led to the hottest debate. He did end the meeting with a moment of levity.

"Isn't this a great country," he said.

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