

Schroeder new chair of Jefferson County Board

By Ryan Whisner, Union regional editor | Posted: Wednesday, April 16, 2014 9:40 am

JEFFERSON — The face of leadership on the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors changed Tuesday as District 19 Supervisor Jim Schroeder of Jefferson was elected as the new county board chairperson.

In perhaps one of the biggest surprises of the spring election on April 1, John Molinaro, the board's former chairperson, was upset in his bid for re-election in District 16 by challenger Laura Payne.

Four other newcomers to the board — Kirk Lund, Michael Wineke, Peter Hartz and Katherine Murley — gained seats after the incumbents failed to file candidacy papers or resigned their positions, leaving the race wide open for those looking to serve.

On Tuesday, as part of its organizational meeting, through a nomination process, seven supervisors were nominated for the chairperson position. In addition to Schroeder, supervisors James Braughler, Blane Poulson, Walt Christensen, Augie Tietz, Don Reese and George Jaeckel were nominated. Only Schroeder, Braughler and Jaeckel accepted the nomination.

Each of the three candidates was given three minutes to address the board and then a primary vote was taken.

Schroeder, who represents Wards 1, 2 and 10 in the City of Jefferson, said he intended to bring a collaborative leadership style to the board as opposed to a top down command and control style of leadership.

“A style focused on policy-making, our prime function and not on micro-management of operational matters,” he explained.

Schroeder noted that collectively the board is an impressive group taking into consideration the qualifications, education and experience of each of the members.

“No one person should dominate this group,” he said. “We will come up with the best policy decisions by working together in a collaborative manner and that is the example I will set for you as your chairman.”

Schroeder is employed and admitted he would not be attending every meeting or at the courthouse every day.

“We can trust our committees and our staff to do good work without the chairman hovering over them,” he said. “If my assistance is needed, I’ll be there. Otherwise I’ll concentrate on leading and organizing the work of this board in collaboration with each of you.”

Schroeder said the board can do its best work by focusing on policy-making and avoiding the temptation to involve itself in operational matters.

“Our job is to approve an annual budget and give policy direction to the administrator as needed,” he said. “I’ll be a leader by example, keeping us in our role as policy-makers.”

Braughler said it was encouragement from fellow supervisors and the blessing of his wife when he agreed to have his name on the ballot.

He is serving his fourth term on the county board.

Braughler said he brings a background in education, having taught government and economics as well as fine arts. He was involved in administration at the high school level.

“I’ve been involved in the city (Watertown) through a whole host of activities in town,” he said. “I’m sort of a jack of all trades.”

Braughler noted that he learned about the county’s buildings on the Infrastructure Committee, the general administration of the county and the rules on Administration and rules Committee, and the budget on Finance Committee. Also he has served as chairman of the Human Resources Committee.

Further, Braughler cited his service during the strategic planning process and, most recently, on the Administrator Search Committee.

He said one trait the search committee highlighted in a search for an administrator was being a “servant leader.”

“The reason that was the most important to me is because I think of that characteristic as what I like to be as a leader,” Braughler said. “Serving with you, with others for the people of the county, with the people who work for the county working in one giant package together.”

As chairman, he said he would not spend every day at the courthouse. However, he said he would like to spend time early on getting to know more of the committee members and department heads with whom he is not as familiar.

“Once that period is over, to go back to just being an advisement-type chairman and swing the pendulum back from where it has been the last couple of terms,” Braughler said.

Lastly, Jaeckel touted his re-election to the board over an opponent in the recent election.

“I think that is saying something for my constituents, where they have brought me back three times, and each time with a greater majority of the vote,” he said. “I think I’m kind of a mild-mannered guy but I think I can handle the job. I think we can do it fair.”

Echoing both Braughler and Schroder, he too said he would not be present at all times.

“That’s not the chairman’s job to be here 24/7 watching over people — that is what we have the departments for and that’s why the other 29 of you are here for ... to oversee departments as a committee,” Jaeckel said. “I think we can get along a lot better if somebody doesn’t feel they are the boss of it.”

He feels the chairman’s role is to run the meeting in a calm, orderly fashion.

Schroeder won on the first ballot, earning 15 votes. Braughler picked up 11 votes and Jaeckel earned three votes.

“I appreciate the support I have,” Schroeder said. “I won by 50 percent plus one of my goals will be that six months, a year and two years from now the percentage of people on this board that say he is doing a good job will be much higher.”

Following the election of the new chairperson, the board proceeded with elections for the first and second vice chairperson. The positions previously have been held by Supervisors Jim Mode and Rick Kuhlman respectively.

Supervisor Steve Nass narrowly was elected as first vice chairperson over Supervisor Jim Mode in a 15-14 vote. A primary vote also included Jaeckel.

Rounding out the new faces of leadership for the board, Braughler eventually was elected as second vice chairperson. He had served on the Administration and Rules Committee in place of Kuhlman since his resignation in September.

Braughler was elected over Supervisor Amy Rinard in a 19-10 vote after the two were selected in the primary ballot that also included supervisors Dick Schultz, Augie Tietz and Ron Buchanan.

Among the first actions of the newly sworn-in county supervisors was to further advance the process of the construction of a new Jefferson County Highway Department facility.

A total of 19 of the 21 bid packages related to the construction of the facility were approved Tuesday by the board.

Maas Brothers Construction Co., of Watertown, previously had been selected by the board in January as the construction management firm based on its general conditions and supervision bids totaling \$348,000 and a two percent fee yielding an estimated price of \$13,795,000 for construction costs.

The \$15 million project, which has been in the works for several years, is scheduled to begin construction this spring and be completed by the end of this year.

Total cost includes a contingency of \$700,000. Contracts approved Tuesday and the final tally does not include an estimated \$400,000 in furniture, fixtures and equipment for the new facility.

Contract for everything from the project's asphalt work, fencing, landscaping, masonry and roofing to its fuel pumps and pre-cast concrete walls, cost approximately \$13,470,509. Although there has been considerable discussion about the overall project, board members offered no comments on approving the contracts to get construction under way.

Of the 24 supervisors present at the time of the vote, only Supervisor Carl Zentner cast a vote against the contracts.

Meanwhile, in other business, the board:

- Authorized a \$124,299 contract with SHI of Somerset, N.J., to upgrade the software protecting the system that allows for removal access by Human Services and Health Department employees. Per the contract, 125 concurrent users would be allowed and is expandable. Additional costs of Microsoft licenses and training is \$38,306 for a total project cost of \$162,605.
- Amended the county's civil service ordinance to include a probationary period of 18 months to match the three-year collective bargaining agreement approved with the sheriff's deputies.
- Designated the Human Services Department to serve as the entity to operate the Coordinated Services Team funded by the state, and designed to lower the incident of suspension and expulsion of children in the county.
- Designated May 15 as Law Enforcement Memorial Day in Jefferson County.
- Authorized Jefferson County Parks Director Joe Nehmer to submit applications for state Department of Natural Resources grants for two projects.

The first is a \$30,000 grant to improve the boat launch and install a new handicap accessible pier at Rock River Park. The project is estimated to cost \$60,000 and the county has received \$25,000 from the Watertown Outboarders.

Nehmer also will be applying for a \$75,000 grant to improve access and parking areas on the east side of Dorothy Carnes County Park. The total project cost is expected to be approximately \$150,000, half of which was included in the 2014 budget.

- Recognized a total of \$25,625 in donations to the Jefferson County Clean Sweep and Recycling programs.

- Amended the county's rules for reimbursement to ensure a fair and uniform method for all employees.
- Increased the passport photo fee charged at the Jefferson County Clerk's office from \$10 to \$12.
- Created a fulltime community resource coordinator wraparound position and a fulltime personal assistant case manager/family coordinator Human Services. Funding for both positions is through state or federal grants and contracts.

If funding is not available to support the positions, the positions will be eliminated. The board also increased the part-time Human Services dementia care specialist position from 19 hours a week to fulltime.

- Increased the vacant Jefferson County Parks program assistant position from .6 FTE (full-time equivalency) to full-time and decreased the hours of the administrative assistant to .6 FTE. Due to the program assistant being vacant for two months, it is anticipated no additional funds will be needed.