

# Candidates air views at forum

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SOUTH HADLEY - Participants in last night's candidates forum at Town Hall sponsored by the Know Your Town civic group anonymously posed questions that appeared to highlight the differences between the two incumbents on the Selectboard.

Pointed questions were put to Selectman Richard A. Constant and Carlene C. Hamlin. Constant and Hamlin are in a three-way race with legislative aide Robert G. Judge for the two seats open on the Selectboard in Monday's municipal election.

Perhaps the most pointed question asked the candidates to comment on how Selectboard meetings have become heated of late.

"It is important we treat each other with respect and civility," Constant said, calling for an atmosphere of respect and civility. "I never come to any situation thinking I have all the answers."

In contrast, Hamlin said in earlier years board members could agree to disagree without being disagreeable. She criticized the board for recently ousting Selectman Marilyn G. Ishler as its chair on the grounds that she was missing some meetings because of a

trip to Florida, whereas a previous chair had made similar trips with no action taken.

"I think it was very sexist and very unfitting for people in leadership roles," Hamlin said, calling the board "dysfunctional" of late.

"We have to respect the opinions of each other," Judge said.

Judge advocated for striving for unanimity of opinion" as evidenced by 5-0 votes. As an example, Judge said the Historical Commission once had a 3-2 vote but went on to re-vote the matter 5-0 because a reporter was present at its meeting and members wanted to present a united front.

Hamlin and Constant also differed over the subject of whether or not the town can afford, in her words, "platinum-plated compensation." Constant said although the Selectboard has set \$90,000 in the proposed fiscal 2009 budget as the salary for a new town administrator, he pointed out that the interim town administrator is being paid \$65 an hour.

Constant said that based on a 40-hour work week that would come to \$130,000 a year.

"I'm a little bit confused as to the position the board has taken," Constant said.

Hamlin said her comment

referred to the \$101,000 annual salary paid the previous town administrator while other communities pay lower salaries for similar positions.

Participants, who numbered about 50, also had a chance to pose questions about a ballot question seeking adoption of the state Community Preservation Act. The ballot question calls for a 3 percent

property tax surcharge that could fund projects in open space, affordable housing and historic preservation.

Constance A. Clancy, chairwoman of the Community Preservation Act Study Committee, said income cutoffs and exemptions would ensure the more low-paid residents of town would be unaffected by the proposed surcharge.