



Variety of groups schedule forums for city election candidates

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The race for Springfield mayor leading up to the April 5 election will include far more than a battle of ads, pamphlets and door-knocking. Several groups are hosting forums or debates that will give voters a chance to see the aspirants in action.

Some aldermanic candidates will also be featured in forums.

The four top vote-getters in the Feb. 22 mayoral primary remain in the running – Mike Houston, Sheila Stocks-Smith, Mike Coffey Jr. and Frank Kunz. Kunz has indicated he does not plan to attend most of the forums, which he characterizes as being put on by special interest groups.

Among coming events:

Monday, March 14

From 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Illinois Association of Realtors building, 522 S. Fifth St., candidates for mayor are to be in a debate put on by the Capital Area Association of Realtors, Downtown Springfield Inc., the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and the University of Illinois Springfield.

Bill Wheelhouse of WUIS radio and Bernard Schoenburg of The State Journal-Register will moderate. Because of limited seating capacity, free tickets will be required for attendance. Information about tickets is available from the chamber's Josh Collins at 525-1173 or jcollins@gsc.org.

Tuesday, March 15

Midtown Rotary Club is hosting a luncheon and mayoral forum at the Inn at 835, 835 S. Second St.

It is not yet determined if enough space will be available to open the event to the public, said Bill Stokes, a board member of the club. The forum will key on issues of health and human services, and the moderator will be Amanda Vinicky, Statehouse bureau chief for WUIS-FM/Illinois Public Radio.

The lunch begins at 11:45 a.m., with the forum expected to be from about 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

Friday, March 18

* From 8 to 9 a.m., the candidates for mayor have been invited to the studio of WTAX radio to face off on "Morning Newswatch" with Bob Murray. Listeners can hear the discussion at 1240 AM and 107.5 FM, said Michelle Eccles, news director.

* From 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Capital Area Business Alliance, meeting in the ballroom at Caitie Girls restaurant, 400 E. Jefferson St., will feature questioning of mayoral candidates on matters of importance to local business owners. Cost of lunch is \$12. RSVPs in advance are preferred via e-mail to info@ibuyspi.com.

Monday, March 21

The MacArthur Boulevard Business Association hosts a forum from 6 to 8 p.m. at South Side Christian Church, 2600 S. MacArthur Blvd. Invited are candidates for mayor and those on the ballot in Wards 6 and 7.

A wide range of issues could be discussed, including economic development and tax increment financing, said David Farrell, vice president of the group and the event's moderator. The association's president, Cory Jobe, is the only candidate on the Ward 6 ballot. Ward 7's race features Joe McMenamin, John Laurenzana and Michael Higgins. The event is free and open to the public.

Tuesday, March 22

* There will be a mayoral debate from 7 to 8 p.m. at Brookens Auditorium at the University of Illinois Springfield. It will be carried live on WICS-Channel 20 and WMAY, 970 AM, said WICS managing editor Rebecca Clark.

More details will be available later, including where free tickets will be available. Kunz said he plans to participate in this debate.

* Five neighborhood groups are hosting a forum with Ward 5 Ald. Sam Cahnman and challenger Ryan Tozer at 7 p.m. at Elliott Avenue Baptist Church, 501 W. Elliott Ave.

Steve Combs, president of the Enos Park Neighborhood Association, said his group as well as Downtown Springfield Inc. and the Vinegar Hill, Lincoln Park and Oak Ridge neighborhood associations will be involved in presenting questions to the Ward 5 aldermanic candidates. The event is free and open to the public.

Friday, March 25

The Citizens Club of Springfield is hosting a mayoral forum at the LRS Theater of the Hoogland Center for the Arts, 420 S. Sixth St. Club president Bob Gray said the hourlong event at 8 a.m. is free and open to the public.

Voter registration

The regular voter registration period for the April 5 election ends today (Tuesday).

In order to vote, voters must be registered under their current name and address. Anyone who has had a name change must re-register in order to cast a ballot.

If the registration is done in person at the Sangamon County election office, Room 105 of the Sangamon County Complex, 200 S. Ninth St., then two forms of identification are required, including one showing the current residence address of the applicant.

Registration can also be done through deputy registrars or at a driver's license facility.

People who miss Tuesday's registration deadline will have an additional opportunity to register and vote under what is called a grace period. From Wednesday through March 29, people can go to the election office to register or change their voting address, but they must vote while still in that office after registering. They will not be able to cast ballots at their usual polling places on April 5.

In-person absentee voting will also be allowed in the election office from Wednesday through 5 p.m. April 4. No reason is needed for a person to vote absentee.

The election office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. It will be open from 8:30 a.m. to noon on March 12, 19 and 20; and from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 26 and 27.

Questions can be directed to the election office at 753-VOTE (8683).

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