



District 2 candidates on senior housing, Cobb schools

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A question asked of candidates running to succeed retiring Cobb County Commissioner Bob Ott this week was inspired by the Cobb School District, which often sends representatives to zoning hearings to object to certain proposed developments.

A common objection is to senior housing developments. People older than 62 in Cobb County are exempt from paying the property tax owed to county schools, which makes up the largest portion of county residents' property tax bills each year. Approving such developments, representatives of the school district argue, deprive the school district of property tax revenue.

The question asked of those running to represent Cobb's District 2 representative on the Board of Commissioners: "If elected, would you continue to approve senior developments, as the board often does, or side with the school district in opposing them?"

There are three Republicans vying to win the June 9th primary: Fitz Johnson, Andy Smith and Kevin Nicholas. The winner will face Democrat Jerica Richardson in the Nov. 3 general election.

The district encompasses most of east Cobb and includes Cumberland, Vinings, Smyrna, the Mabry Park area and the Terrell Mill/Powers Ferry area. It has been under Ott's representation since he was first elected to the role in 2008.

Andy Smith

Smith, who served as Ott's appointee on the Cobb Planning Commission before stepping down to run for office, challenged the premise of the question.

"I think there is a lot of reason to believe that the impact of the senior exemption as far as it affects property tax for schools is a little bit misunderstood," he said. "The cost to send a student to school exceed the revenue from (what) the average family would pay in property tax."

Approval of a senior housing development would be done on a case-by-case basis, Smith said.

"That said, we also got to consider in every case, as you're weighing the merits of the case, that Cobb County needs a place for senior housing," he added. "To dismiss a senior housing project solely on the basis of whether it does or doesn't generate revenue for the school I think would be a mistake."

He acknowledged that senior housing is often slightly denser than the alternative, which concerns people who think the traffic in their area is bad enough as it is.

He said concerns about senior developments contributing to traffic woes are unfounded. Study after study, he said, has demonstrated that the less regular travel patterns of older people will not contribute to the rush hour crush.