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As deadline nears, vacancies on Easthampton school panel

By CATHERINE BAUM
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EASTHAMPTON - With about one week left to settle the ballot for November's municipal election, officials are still looking for at least four more School Committee candidates.

One incumbent, Ladonna Crow, 42, of 13 Holyoke St. and one newcomer, Bonnie Katusich, have filed nomination papers. Six additional candidates have taken out paperwork but not returned it, according to Assistant City Clerk MaryAnn Giza. The deadline to return paperwork is Sept. 15.

There are six open seats for two-year terms on the School Committee. Schools Superintendent Deborah Carter and Mayor Michael A. Tautznik also sit on the committee.

"I'm very excited; I've been waiting for the right time," Katusich said of her candidacy.

Crow did not return phone calls to comment Thursday.

When asked what she looks for in School Committee candidates, Carter declined to comment.

School Committee Chairman Thomas Brown, who will not seek a fifth term in November, said people should run on the premise they have a passion for or interest in the school system.

"Give it 110 percent to see if you can make a difference," Brown said. "A lot of times it centers around the budget but there are many other policy issues that touch families, that touch students. No one's looking for folks to serve for an eternity but if people who were looking to run gave two or three terms I think that would be great."

A certified public accountant and self-described "concerned parent" with four children in Easthampton schools, Katusich said she believes her background could benefit the committee.

"Clearly I have a vested interest," Katusich said. "These are tough times and while I've been attending the committee meetings and I like what I see, I still think my experience might have a lot to offer the committee going forward."

She has been working with government agencies as an auditor or financial officer since 1990.

As director of operations for the Willie Ross School for the Deaf in Longmeadow, Katusich oversees the building, technology, human resources and finances of the organization. She manages a \$3 million budget for the school, which has an enrollment of nearly 70 students.

"We're in a very healthy state right now, in spite of the economy," said Katusich, who has been director of operations for five years. "And it looks like it's going to be another good year for us."

Katusich said she is also prepared to discuss the school building project with the School Committee and the community.

"I can help people understand the impact on their taxes," said Katusich, who supports the project. "I can help the community understand the impact on our students and its graduates into the future."

With children in Maple Elementary School, White Brook Middle School and Easthampton High School,



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Katusich said she believes its important for School Committee members to understand the programs in addition the financial piece of school operations.

"I'm not all business," she said.

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