

## Naperville Park District “Virtual” Candidate Forum



The April 6<sup>th</sup> election will include 8 candidates: Lee Kaseska, Nag Jaiswal, Mary Gibson, Leslie Ruffing, Rhonda Ansier, Alison Thompson, Nathan Wilson and = Mike King; seeking one of the four open seats on the Naperville Park District Board of Commissioners. In an effort to better know and understand those running for this important office, the Confederation reached out to these candidates and asked that they provide a written answer to a single question. Just as in our traditional candidate forums, the responses of the candidates would be limited to a set amount (in this

case 250 words), managed at the discretion of the Confederation. The question we asked the candidates was:

**Is there a particular issue, policy, initiative or opportunity that prompted you to seek a seat on the Park Board? If so, how will you pursue addressing this if elected?**

**Mary Gibson:** As a mother of three young kids, the Park District has been such an important resource for my family, I want to ensure it continues to be a strong community asset for all of Naperville. I am a former director at a data analytics firm, a long-time area resident, and active community volunteer. In my former role, I advised Fortune 500 companies, government entities, and non-profits on public sentiment, unforeseen risks, and strategic opportunities. I am a member of Naperville’s Community Emergency Response Team and facilitate a book discussion group at a local bookstore with a mission to foster civil discourse within the community. I have a bachelor’s degree in political science and history and a master’s degree in social science from the University of Chicago.



Between my three young children, I have sent my kids to four years (and counting!) of Park District preschool, have gone to hundreds of park district soccer and T-ball games, and have participated in more Park District mommy-and-me ballet, gym cats, and music classes than I can count. If elected, I will bring the perspective and insights of a parent actively participating in the wide range programs and activities our Park District offers. As a Commissioner, I will prioritize quality and affordable programming, commit to making Naperville Park District a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability, and will be fiscally responsible – ensuring that Park District funds and resources are spent directly fulfilling its mission of helping the people of Naperville lead healthy lives.

**Leslie Ruffing:** I am honored to introduce myself to the Naperville Area Homeowners Confederation in lieu of the typical candidate forum. I am Leslie Ruffing and I am running for the position of Naperville Park District Board Commissioner! My husband and I relocated to Naperville nine years ago and have loved raising our two daughters in such an exceptional town. I have been dedicated to a variety of local volunteer opportunities as I am passionate and energetic about giving back to such a resource-rich community. I am now ready to serve at a higher level. I have spent the last 15 years advising clients on spending and budgeting as a Structured Settlement Annuity Broker, a skill I plan to lean on to successfully oversee the efficient use of Naperville residents’ tax dollars. I believe that fiscal responsibility and transparency during decision making are vital to a healthy Park District Board and as Commissioner I will strive to ensure that our Naperville Park District offers classes and events that are inclusive and affordable. I will continue to make certain that all areas of Naperville have nearby opportunities for engagement, and I will work to maintain and strengthen the strong reputation the Park District has as a leader in conservation efforts. I hope to earn your vote on April 6!



**Rhonda Ansier:** I am seeking this seat on the Park Board because I want a way to serve the community that I have grown to love and to help represent all of the individuals and families the park district serves. The decision last summer of the park board to sue the Governor was a decision I did not feel was in the best interest of the community and was not a good use of tax dollars. The board is non-partisan, and as such, decisions need to be made that are also non-partisan. The park board should remain focused on the services we provide and ensuring they are representative of the needs of the community.



If elected, I will ensure that all decisions are made with the community we are serving in mind and not personal agendas. My work experience as a nurse has given me a tremendous ability to listen to people and to partner with them in providing for their needs without judgement or bias. If elected I will utilize those skills to listen to the community members, to partner with them, and to help provide the services and access they need from the park district.

**Lee Kaseska:** One of the important issues that I have concerns our children. I feel that it is so important to offer opportunities to our high school and college students. They need classes in leadership, management, and organizational skills for today's jobs. These classes would give them experience and they could put this on their resume. While they are learning they are earning money for school. The Naperville Park District provides a competitive salary for our summer employees. If the student wants to continue working year after year at the Naperville Park District that is usually welcomed. A nice benefit is that their hourly wage goes up each year. That is why I would promote and provide the funds from the Naperville Park District budget to support these programs. These benefits would be provided to our summer work programs throughout Naperville Park District Programs. I also would like to expand the number of positions available to students during the summer months.

My boys were lifeguards in the summer months at Centennial Beach for many years. One of my sons became an instructor for the lifeguard program and that experience stimulated him to go to medical school and now he is an Internal Medicine Doctor in Grand Rapids Michigan. Who would have known!

**Alison Thompson:** I hope to ensure funds are not being misspent on political grandstanding or statement lawsuits. I want to use funds from taxpayers to develop affordable, relevant programming that reaches a wide audience. Especially in these trying times, people rely on park district programming to feel connected to their community, and by using funds to better reach people remotely, our community will grow stronger.

I feel strongly that scholarship programs and aid should be expanded to better serve taxpayers, especially those that may have not qualified for aid in the past. I know even with two working parents in our house, it was a struggle to put our children through park district preschool, and I know other households struggled with the same.

Spending taxpayer's dollars on community building and programming that unites us will be one of my first priorities in taking office.



**Mike King:** I am running for my second term on the Naperville Park District Board. I ran for my first term to give back to a community that has provided me with so much. Now I am running to maintain our district core values:

Health and Wellness, Environmental Education, Stewardship and Sustainability, Community Enrichment, Public Safety, Accessibility, Personal Growth and Enrichment.

If I am lucky enough to earn the votes from the residents of Naperville and serve a second term as a Commissioner, I will focus on our vision of being a national leader in parks and recreation providing and promoting high quality experiences and facilities at a great value to our community, also promoting healthy lives, healthy minds and a healthy community.



**Nathan Wilson:** The opportunity that prompted me to seek a seat on the Park Board was my becoming aware of a couple board members not seeking reelection and my desire to continue their habit of financial stewardship in order to meet the demands of the taxpayers. I work on financial technology as a Senior Software Engineer and have a background in Finance giving me a unique perspective on solving economic problems efficiently. The Park District as whole has done a great job keeping a balanced budget, receiving a Moody's Aaa rating, and keeping the projected average property tax flat, especially given the Covid pandemic. I would like to help continue maximizing the tax dollars to fund Parks and Programs that are desired most and/or help those most in need.



Additional to the financial aspects above, I am also excited to get programs open as much and as soon as possible. This past year has placed a lot of stress on people given the closures due to Covid and there's plenty of research on happiness from socialization and exercise. I feel I can lend my experience as we continue to open programs and deal with restrictions having had my children (7 and 6) go to Park District Camps, daddy daughter dances, and personally volunteering as a soccer coach for many years.

Lastly, I will try to help whether it comes to pulling weeds on a baseball field or helping clean door handles. Bottom line, to me, is get it done. <https://www.facebook.com/WilsonForNapervilleParks>

**Nag Jaiswal** did not respond to our requests for a response to this question.