

## WDM special election to pick mayor

Steven Gaer is an early entry for the April 17 election. Other candidates have until March 23 to file.

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West Des Moines will hold a special election for mayor and a former city councilman has already said he wants the job.

A group of 407 residents signed a petition that was filed last week requesting the city hold a special election to fill the seat of mayor. Council members earlier this month appointed Rick Messerschmidt to serve as interim mayor. The special election will be April 17.

A second group of residents has submitted a petition to place Steven Gaer, 46, a former city councilman and executive vice president of R & R Realty Group, on the ballot.

Residents who want to run for mayor have until noon March 23 to turn in nomination papers along with the signatures of at least 75 residents to the City Clerk's office, 4200 Mills Civic Parkway.

Gaer served as an at-large council member from 1996 to 2003. He said he decided not to seek re-election at the time because he was extensively traveling for his job as in-house counsel for Marsh & McLennan Cos. Inc. He has since changed jobs and no longer has the travel commitments.

Gaer said his years on the council were a huge turning point for the city of West Des Moines: the city built a new library, City Hall and aquatic facilities; hired a new city manager, police and fire chiefs and public works director; and landed the multi-million-dollar Wells Fargo campus and Jordan Creek Town Center.

"There were major changes in West Des Moines during those eight years, and I loved being involved and want to be involved again," he said.

Gaer said he had considered running for council again but found the mayor's role appealing when it opened. Gene Meyer resigned as the city's mayor last month after he was named the commissioner of the Iowa Department of Public Safety.

"The mayor has an opportunity to bring consensus to everything and be part of the bigger picture and participate in regional issues," Gaer said.

He said he wants to work closely with officials from other cities in the Des Moines area. Gaer said other issues he would address if elected are continuing to improve quality of life elements such as parks and trails in the city, keeping ahead of development and addressing needs for new streets and water and sewer lines, and keeping taxes and fees low for residents.

Service to West Des Moines is a standing tradition in the Gaer family. Gaer's father, Kent Gaer, was a councilman for 16 years, and Steven Gaer said he can remember campaigning for his dad as a youngster. Kent Gaer later served on the West Des Moines Water Works board.

Steven Gaer said he has experienced various aspects of being a West Des Moines citizen that make him a good fit for mayor: as a resident who has watched the city grow for more than four decades and as a businessman who works with developers and is involved with economic development.

"I understand all of the issues and where everybody is coming from and what they'd like to get accomplished," he said.