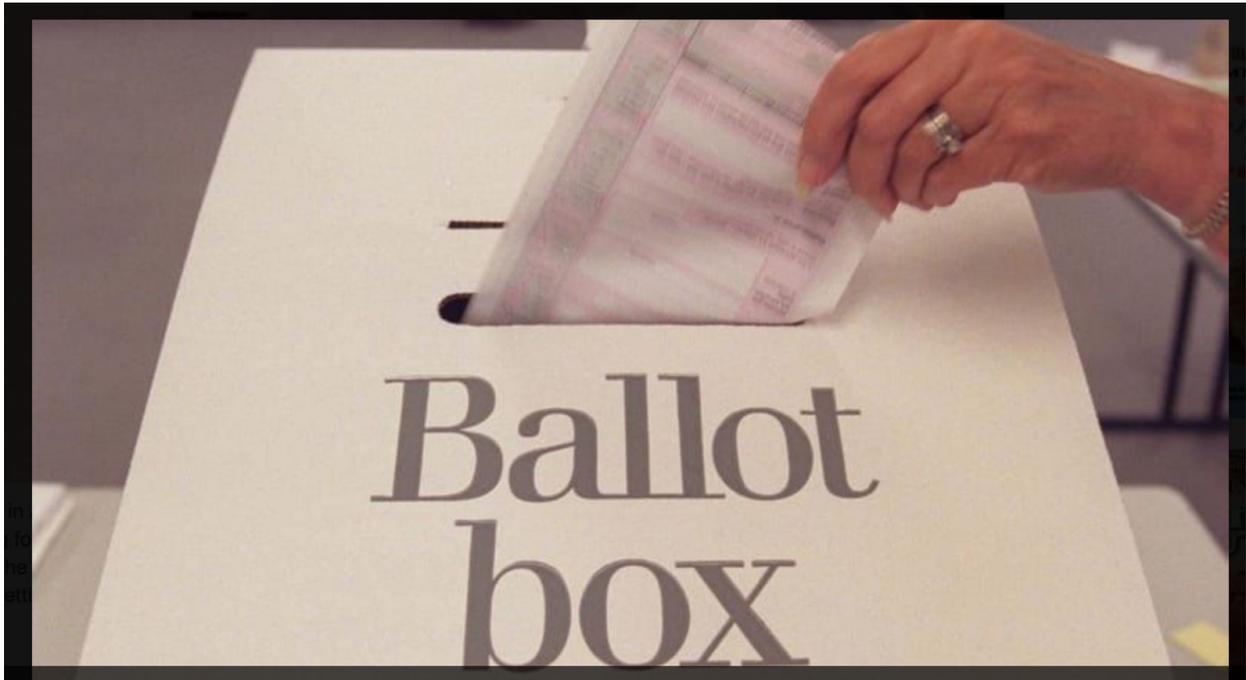


Workshop seeks to inspire new local leaders

By [RICK OLIVO rolivo@ashlanddailynews.net](mailto:rolivo@ashlanddailynews.net)

Nov 14, 2018



With over 150 local elections in Ashland and Bayfield County of which well over half go uncontested, there is a need for citizens to step forward and consider running for local office. Making the way easier is an "Elected Office 101" seminar jointly sponsored by the University of Wisconsin Extension and the Ashland/Bayfield County League of Women Voters. The event is intended to help first-time candidates understand the process for getting on the ballot, running a campaign and even dealing with negative feedback.

Elizabeth Franek spent months watching the Ashland City Council work – and sometimes, perhaps not work very well — before she made the difficult decision to make her first run for office.

“It was way out of my comfort zone,” the Ninth Ward representative said.

Franek said she found the paperwork to get her name on the ballot to be “straightforward,” and she enjoyed going door-to-door and meeting future constituents.

“Getting to know what issues people had and meeting the people was really exciting,” she said. “Everybody has a story and a lot of people are struggling, and it feels good to be a part of something positive.”

University of Wisconsin-Bayfield County community development educator Kellie Pederson and her Ashland County counterpart, Lissa Radtke, want to inspire more people to take the plunge that Franek did.

They and the local League of Women Voters have put together an effort to increase civic engagement and encourage new candidates to run. It is a workshop entitled “Elected office 101: A workshop for candidates considering local office.”

In their minds, it couldn’t come at a better time.

“In April of 2019, voters in Ashland and Bayfield counties will elect more than 150 local representatives to office,” Pederson said. “Those include positions on town boards, city councils and school boards.”

Those positions are all crucial to the way local governments work, yet all too often those who do run for office are unopposed, and sometimes there is simply no one on the ballot running for a local position.

“In April 2017, in Bayfield County, 75 percent of candidates ran unopposed for decision-making seats in municipal elections,” Pederson said.

The workshop addresses some of the apprehensions that first-time candidates like Franek have to overcome, and teaches them the basics of how to get involved.

“Really, the goal is to provide a place for potential candidates to have a safe and supportive place to talk about their fears and concerns about running for office. It is also to help them understand a little bit more about the nuts and bolts of running for office,” she said.

Pederson said people, especially women, shy away from running for office for a variety of reasons. She cited a 2016 University of Wisconsin study that showed the concerns for women and men were similar, but often more pronounced with women.

“They are things you are not going to find on your nomination papers. They are things like the specific responsibilities of elected office, how does one run against an incumbent, understanding the process for getting on the ballot, dealing with negative feedback and criticism. How do you deal with disagreeing with friends and neighbors over contentious issues?” Pederson said.

Franek won her first-ever election, but wishes now that an Elected Office 101 had been available before she began her run.

“Before I started, it was very scary. It was a real big step, even to go out and get signatures; you didn’t know what people were going to say,” she said. “If I didn’t know anything about public office, yeah, having something like Election 101 would be great.”

Bayfield County Clerk Scott Fibert will take part in the workshop, as will his Ashland County counterpart Heather Schutte. He said that in Bayfield County, the number of people running for election was relatively low, despite the fact that the turnout at the polls was “exceedingly high.”

“It is some of the highest in the state, so we are talking about people that are very educated — they vote. So what is that fine line that makes them get involved and actually run for office?” he asked. “It is a very interesting question as to why there is almost an 82 percent voter turnout and why they don’t take the next step and make the decision to run.”

Pedersen said the UW Extension’s partner in the event has been asked to get their membership to look around the community for people who might run for office.

“The definitive part of the data was that the most important thing we can do to encourage people to run is to just ask them,” she said.

The workshop itself will be facilitated by about 10 local leaders who will be involved in five rotating small group breakout sessions that include such topics as disagreeing with friends and neighbors, dealing with negative feedback, responsibilities of local officials, ethics decisions, agendas and procedures. Another session will cover the mechanics of running, such as nomination papers, caucuses, filing deadlines and fiscal compliance.

The session takes place on Thursday from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.

“Every year there are elections — county board, school board, city council, tribal elections town councils — there is no lack of seats that need to be filled every year,” Pederson said.

https://www.apg-wi.com/ashland_daily_press/paywall/workshop-seeks-to-inspire-new-local-leaders/article_f1af0ab2-e78e-11e8-8a87-3f8413a78768.html