

REPUBLICANS

DEMOCRATS



Blair



Sharpe



Storms



Norman



Hagan



Castor



Scott

County Commission Tilts To Right, Adding Pro-Development Muscle

By TED BYRD
tbyrd@tammtrih.com

to social programs.”

COUNTY COMMISSION

Continued From Page 1

...e board.
...were unafraid to
...akes on developers
...business.
...place will be Mark
...Brian Blair, conser-
...vatives expected to
...more business-
...their election also
...3 Democratic ad-
...d replaces it with a
...jority.
...4, ran unsuccess-
...ngress three times
...s and is a develop-
...er and teacher at
...dge School. He de-
...ocrat Denise Layne
...tisan candidate Joe
...a former profes-
...stler and former
...r Gold's Gyms, is a

frequent community volunteer and member of the Hillsborough Citizen Advisory Committee. He said his business experience would bring a fresh perspective to local government.

Blair's race against former city councilman Bob Buckhorn was close, and a final vote was tabulated Friday. Once all the absentee and provisional votes were counted, Blair won 217,487 to 214,980, election officials said.

Commissioners Ronda Storms and Ken Hagan, also conservative Republicans, won re-election to four-year terms.

Newbies Oppose Impact Fees

Political observers agree that builders and developers probably will thrive in the new environment. Neither Blair nor Sharpe, for example, are fans of impact fees.

In recent years, the board has created a number of impact-fee-free zones to spur de-

velopment. It's working, especially in southern Hillsborough.

"There is no stopping that train with the board that's coming in," Schmitt said.

Sharpe and Blair received heavy financial support from the building and development industry during the election, although they also emphasize that they drew money from a broad base of supporters.

Storms agreed that the elections could benefit developers.

"I think that the development community is probably smiling today," she said the day after the election.

But the board won't move in lock step, she said. An affinity for the business community won't mean that views of private citizens aren't considered.

"The citizens are very influential and powerful," Storms said. "They are far more sophisticated than when I came on the board six years ago. And they are not to be counted out."

The board's true political personality will work itself out slowly in coming months, commissioners and political observers say. At the local level, party loyalty and ideology usually take a back seat to the practical reality of governing.

"It's going to take the board awhile to start getting a personality," Storms said.

Jim Porter, a former deputy county attorney now with the Ruden McClosky law firm, agreed.

"Everyone who has ever been elected wants to learn how things work and how to do a good job for constituents," he said. "These guys will be the same way."

One obvious change coming will be the loss of institutional knowledge, said Porter, who specializes in land-use law. Frank and Platt have more than 60 years experience in elected office.

Frank was in the Legislature when the state's growth-management laws were written and

had a hand in the process. Platt is a veteran of thousands of local zoning cases.

"Their combined institutional knowledge, and just their knowledge of how land-use law works, is lost," Porter said.

Todd Pressman, a GOP political consultant who worked for the Blair and Sharpe campaigns, dismisses the pro-development talk. He said the current board approved its share of development, it just exacted strong concessions to keep neighbors happy and protect the environment.

"This is not a situation where it's going to be any kind of open door," he said. "They'll be more open-minded to it. But that doesn't mean that more developments will get approved."

Similar Politics

The biggest change may be a more homogenized political philosophy on a board that will believe business is inherently

good and government frequently bad.

"You're going to have a lot more members from the same political sphere. Just by that virtue, you're going to have a group of individuals who understand each other better," Pressman said.

He also said that won't guarantee peace and harmony. Consider state government in Tallahassee, where the GOP controls the governor's mansion and both houses of the Legislature. This year's session was just short of open warfare Pressman said.

It's a tall order to ask people to sit down and make difficult decisions that affect a million people and not become emotional about it, he said.

"It's just not human nature," he said. "Sometimes people look at spirited debate as people not getting along."

Reporter Ted Byrd can be reached at (813) 259-7679.