

Stay with Saxton: Experience tips scales for S.L. District 4 incumbent

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The platforms of Nancy Saxton and Luke Garrott, Salt Lake City Council candidates in District 4, are remarkably similar. Both are progressive Democrats who want to improve mass transit, historic preservation, affordable housing and local business.

So the question that many voters may ask themselves is whether they want to stick with the experience of two-term incumbent Saxton or try the challenger, Garrott, a University of Utah political science professor.

Frankly, it's a close call. Partly for that reason, we give our nod to Saxton. In policy terms, we believe that she and Garrott probably would vote similarly. Given that, there's no compelling reason to turn Saxton out of office, and with that decision lose the depth of her two terms of experience in dealing with issues in the city.

District 4 includes the city's downtown core, from University Street to I-15 and from South Temple to 900 South.

By virtue of his academic career - he holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Florida - Garrott knows political theory. In a course he calls Neighborhood Democracy, he already has brought students and community councils together to study issues. His work in the Westside Leadership Institute has taught residents how to engage local government to improve their communities. He also is a board member of the Central City Neighborhood Council.

But Saxton also had deep experience on community councils before she ran for the City Council. In addition, she ran a small business for 20 years, a bed and breakfast, in her district. When she talks about the hurdles that small businesses face when dealing with the city bureaucracy, she speaks from experience.

Both stress historic preservation. He wants to revive the city's mothballed citywide preservation plan to strengthen compatible development standards and provide incentives for homeowners to restore their property.

She wants to launch a pilot program to develop new affordable housing for young families on property purchased by a redevelopment agency.

Both would create city-operated transit to fill in holes in Utah Transit Authority service. His would be a downtown trolley circulator. Hers would be a neighborhood jitney system to serve youth, seniors and transit-dependent communities.

If voters keep Saxton in office, she will not face a steep learning curve on issues from City Creek Center to Pioneer Park. Garrott would. That tips the scales in Saxton's favor.

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