

## City Pulse - Ingham County Voters Guide

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City Council candidates offer clearly different views

By DANIEL STURM

Lansing's two City Council candidates, Brian Jeffries and Kathy Pelleran, are running to replace Saturnino Rodriguez, who was appointed May 13 to fill the seat of Louis Adado Jr. until the end of the year. Adado resigned April 8 after a City Council employee sued him for sexual harassment. Either Jeffries or Pelleran, both trustees at Lansing Community College, will fill the Council seat for three years beginning Jan. 1. Why are they running?

Jeffries, an attorney for Jeffries, Newton & Baumann, was elected Ingham County commissioner five times, but lost the race for district court judge. From 1993 until 2002, he served on the board of the Lansing Housing Commission and has served more than a dozen other community organizations. "I've been part of this community for 25 years, and from a selfish point of view I could say I want to improve my own life and do the same for my neighborhood and the city."

Pelleran says she'd like to improve city government. Her list of credentials includes training local government leaders in Russia and working as Sen. Carl Levin's Lansing area director from 1983 until 1986. Having handled political deadlines for 26 years "I've organized a timeline of getting things done, instead of just letting them go," says Pelleran, state executive director of the the nonprofit organization "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids."

Major campaign goals

Both candidates advocate strategies for better housing, better schools and better city services. They differ in their views on how local politics should be organized.

Pelleran

Pelleran advocates holding Council committee meetings at times convenient

for working families. Currently, for example, the Council's Committee as a Whole meets at 1:30 p.m. Thursday. Pelleran says people are "sweating bullets, because they have to get back to work." She suggests scheduling meetings either early in the morning or late in the afternoon and holding town meetings on Saturdays. In addition, Pelleran doesn't like how City Council President Larry Meyer cuts people off mid-sentence during public hearings. She said she'd work to see that this was changed. "Lansing citizens want to be involved, so let's involve them instead of limiting debate ."

Jeffries said the tensions in City Council meetings have been an issue for more than a decade. "It's basically how you treat people," he said. "There has to be mutual respect." He also said that tensions at the meeting were due to a "personal style." Jeffries said he would let people complete their thoughts even if their time was up. On boards he's chaired, they "only cut public comment once or twice, because it was off the subject." He suggests introducing two different public hearings, one specifically limited to the agenda, and a second for general comments of the public.

#### Transparency

Early in September Pelleran released her 2001 income tax statements in what she referred to as a "spirit of openness." Pelleran's total income, derived from working as the director of "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids," was \$46,736. Pelleran states that she doesn't receive compensation for her work as an LCC trustee, as a board member of the Lake Superior State University Alumni Association, or for her membership in the Regional Sister Cities Commission and the Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care Association. She's also pointed out that Fight Crime receives funding entirely from foundations and doesn't contract with the City of Lansing. Pelleran announced that in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest she would resign from the LCC Board of Trustees if elected, although her term expires in 2007.

Jeffries responded by filing a statement of financial interest, which the city's ethic ordinance requires only if elected. He denied any potential conflict of interests if elected, saying he would not derive income or benefit directly from any contract with the city. Jeffries' law firm is contracted to provide legal services exclusively to the student governing bodies at Michigan State University and is this year budgeted for \$300,440. Jeffries said he's had no other clients since becoming a full-time attorney for ASMSU in 1998. Although he is a member of two community organizations, the Lansing Art Gallery and the Greater Lansing Housing Coalition, he receives no income from them. Jeffries plans to complete his term as LCC trustee, which ends June 30, 2003. He said he would excuse himself from voting if a conflict of interests arises and, if required, would discontinue his relationship with the organization.

#### Green Space

Jeffries said Lansing had a very good park system and that the River Walk was a tremendous asset to the city. "Do we need more green space? Maybe." He indicated that the city only had a small budget for such projects. He said that he'd have supported Sparrow's Special Land Use request to convert a green area into a temporary parking lot. "I believe Sparrow's intention to rehabilitate the property." However, he thinks City Council missed a real opportunity to start a discussion about the future of the Armory. "The state and the federal government have indicated they want to sell it. That area should be a park."

Pelleran says she likes the "environmental hug," because she grew up in Northern Michigan, "where there are more trees than people." She said Lansing doesn't have enough green space. She suggests whenever the city takes away land for development, it should trade it for more green space elsewhere. She said that in this respect, City Council's recent 6-1 approval of Sparrow Hospital's request for a temporary parking was "a lose-lose for everyone." Many neighbors fear Sparrow won't return the area to its original condition.

Pelleran said she'd involve people more in the decision-making process if elected. "A contract could have been introduced in which Sparrow promises to build a community center if they didn't manage to turn the parking lot back into green space within 18 months."

GM, tax exemptions, and clean air

This year General Motors was given a \$140 million in tax abatements for its new factory. However, the automobile company recently announced the departure of the Pontiac Grand Am, Chevrolet Malibu and Oldsmobile Alero in 2004 and the delay of its \$1 billion Delta plant until 2006. Added to this, Westside neighborhood residents have been complaining about plant emissions, despite Mayor Hollister's Westside Air Quality Task Force's recently released report that in essence called the odors "harmless."

Jeffries

Pelleran said she wasn't happy that GM would move product lines out of Lansing. "We've always been good partners with GM, because we have a talented workforce here. But when you give tax abatements, you have to get more than a pat on the back in return." She said if she gets elected she wants to talk to Westside neighbors in order to better address concerns at City Hall.

Jeffries said there should be no concerns on a scientific level, because GM met all required federal standards. "But then you have a perception of reality issue. It's hard to tell a person it's OK when you smell an odor." He said Mayor David Hollister was doing a great job in opening a dialogue between GM, the city, and the neighborhood, and in giving tax abatements to keep GM.

### Praying in City Council

At the opening of every Monday sessions, for 60 seconds the 10th floor conference room of City Hall turns into a church. The entire Council stands with arms folded, silently attentive as one of the members gives a long Christian prayer as prelude to the Pledge of Allegiance. “Lord, help our Council, since we have a monumental decision of our budget tonight.” These prayers make the words “Under God” seem like a minor violation of the constitutional separation of church and state. Both Pelleran, who attends Grace Lutheran Church, and Jeffries, who is a member of St. Casimir Church, say they support the prayer.

### Gay Rights

At Monday’s LCC trustees’ meeting, Jeffries and Pelleran voted to provide same-sex domestic partner benefits to employees. The proposal passed, making LCC the first of 31 Michigan community colleges to adopt such benefits.

Earlier this year, the Lansing Association for Human Rights Political Action Committee rated Pelleran “Positive” and Jeffries “Somewhat Positive,” based on their responses to a questionnaire, among other considerations. Joe Marutiak, a LAHR-PAC official, said Jeffries was unsupportive of the gay community as an Ingham County commissioner in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In contrast, three LCC board members commended Jeffries for his support of gay rights. In an open letter to the gay community, trustees Todd A. Heywood, Olga Holden and Thomas Rasmusson said Jeffries is “a true friend” of the gay community and described Pelleran as “weak on the issue of protecting LBGT people on the campus of LCC, and we believe she will continue this weak leadership to the City Council if elected.” Neither candidate received LAHR-PAC’s highest rating of “very positive.”  
Ever written a book?

Kathy Pelleran says she has worked with the Midwest Academy in Chicago, who in 1991 published the book “Organizing for social change” (by Kimberley A. Bobo). Jeffries has written law manuals and almost wrote a book, together with his wife and his parents, on the subject of golfing. “We spent a long time but never finished it.”

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