

Who will be the first elected mayor of St. George? Here are the candidates.

St. George interim mayor Dustin Yates and St. George Fire Department Board of Commissioners member Jim Morgan are the two candidates running for mayor in the upcoming March 29 election, when the city's proposed home rule charter will also be voted on.

Both have a history in public service. Yates has served in the St. George Fire Department for 20 years and has worked as chief administrative officer and director of governmental affairs.

Morgan has a background in finance and has served in the military.

But the two candidates have different views on how to run the city, what its priorities should be and whether the proposed home rule charter should pass or not.

The race has already had its fair share of hiccups, with candidate Jim Morgan dropping out of the race after his guilty plea to a prostitution request resurfaced in an article by The Advocate, only to join back in the race six days later. Morgan has called Yates to be "playing dirty" and pointed to his oppositor's campaign having raised far more money as reasons why he first dropped out, but then decided to rejoin, according to statements on his Facebook page.

Dustin Yates has raised over \$140,000 for his campaign and favors the city charter, whereas Morgan has only raised over \$6,000 and is campaigning against the city charter. With the election coming up in under a month, both candidates are in the thick of campaigning.

“I was there from day one,” Yates said, relating how he was involved in the first efforts to try to form the new city in 2013. “I was there through the petition process, through the legal battles and everything else we had to endure during that time.”

He said it was a hard decision for him to step away from the fire department when Governor Jeff Landry appointed him as interim mayor, but that he “wanted to make sure that the city got off on the right foot.”

“We’ve really done quite a bit in the short time we’ve been up and running with limited resources at this point because our sales tax revenue hasn’t transferred yet,” Yates said.

He said his connections and experience in governmental affairs qualify him for the role of mayor.

“I’ve built strong relationships with not only our parish level leaders but state legislators and federal legislators who have a direct impact on the prosperity of our city,” Yates said.

He defends the proposed city charter, which his opponents have criticized for outlining few responsibilities for the mayor and mandating the appointment of a city manager who would have a big role in the city’s governance.

“Every time you propose something new, you’re always going to have opposition because it’s not what people are used to,” Yates said. “The critics who have criticized this don’t fully understand the complexities of the positions yet because it’s new,” he said in the charter’s defense.

His vision for St. George is for it to be “the safest city in the state of Louisiana— that’s non-negotiable.”

“My focus is to see this mission through. I want to make sure our schools are what we need them to be. I want to make sure that this is the best city in the state of Louisiana. And that’s why I’m focused on running and winning this election.”

Opposing candidate Morgan did not respond to several attempts at interviews, but he is very active on his Facebook page, from where he is mostly running his campaign.

“I paid \$450 for an opportunity to represent the taxpayers of St. George, LA, when I realized the city had been sold!” Morgan said on a Facebook post explaining why he decided to run for mayor.

“I am remaining on the Ballot,” he wrote on the same post announcing he was jumping back in the race after he said he would drop out. “I will stay true to my original platform for the NO Home Rule Charter as written.”

One of his main criticisms of the charter is the salaries of the mayor and city manager, which he estimates would be \$160k and \$200k, respectively.

“Is this fiscally responsible? Efficient? Effective? Accountable? Transparent? And, most importantly, best for the taxpayers of St. George?” he wrote.

St. George residents will ultimately decide the race’s outcome, and some shared what they believe should be the future mayor’s top priorities.

“My top priority is fixing the roads because nearly everyone has a spot where you bottom out your car,” said Sam Hudson, a student at Louisiana State University and resident of St. George.

“The second would be the schools,” Hudson said. “I live across the street from Westlake Middle School. It visibly looks run down and under funded.”

Hudson said the mayor’s salary should be proportional to the work he does. “If the neighborhood is improved and residents are happy, a high salary is justified.”

Hudson said the average resident is not very invested in the mayoral race, though.

Cathryn Clay, also an LSU student and resident, agrees.

“I’d like to see the average St. George resident get more and more involved,” she said.

“The local level is really important; our daily lives are decided upon. Big stuff might be national, but our daily stuff, that’s local.”