

# Candidates say upkeep of Salem Common a main issue in Ward 2

By DUSTIN LUCA  
Staff Writer

SALEM — With City Councilor Christine Madore not running for re-election, a new face will represent Ward 2. But first, residents must vote twice.

Three candidates will compete in a preliminary election on Tuesday, Sept. 14: Armand Blanchette, 54; Caroline Watson-Felt, 40; and Jim Zavaglia, 60. The top two vote-getters will continue on to Nov. 2.

Blanchette said he enters the race to represent “the common man,” who he said “feels like he’s being left out.” He said the same of seniors, and then connected them to his past two experiences running for office, as a councilor at-large, about 30 years ago.

“I feel like we’re overdeveloping, creating too much strain,” Blanchette said. “Instead of just talking about it, my friends said, ‘You ran twice before. Run again.’”

Watson-Felt, meanwhile, enters

the race because the time is right on her end, both with her family and with her involvement around the city.

“Ward 2 is the heartbeat of Salem. I’ve lived here the majority of my life, and I’m really proud of that,” Watson-Felt said. “The timing is right for my family. The kids are the right age. I’m working from home more. I’m engaged here.”

Zavaglia, with two attempts at office in the 1990s for Ward 3 and at-large, said his run now is motivated by the behavior of city councilors.

“It just seems there are things going on on the council, where people aren’t getting along,” Zavaglia said. He then mentioned a citizen petition that drew 1,900 signatures and directed the council to discuss wetland protections in the past year. The issue remains stalled in committee. “That’s a mandate from the people. You need to discuss this. Get it out of committee.”

Salem Common remains one of



Armand Blanchette Caroline Watson-Felt Jim Zavaglia

the biggest discussion points in the ward for its condition, upkeep and proposed uses over the years.

All three candidates highlighted the need to protect the Common from attractions like full-scale carnival rides, though they viewed the issue from different angles. Zavaglia said events “have to put up some kind of money, bond, something in place for maintenance.”

For that, he preferred smaller-scale events and favored allowing voices outside the ward at the table for the park’s use as much as those living near the park.

“It’s public space for the entire city of Salem,” Zavaglia said. “There has to be some talk of people outside the

## CANDIDATES

### ARMAND BLANCHETTE

Age: 54  
Years lived in Salem: 49  
Profession: Maintenance at regional hotel  
Elected office experience: None

### CAROLINE WATSON-FELT

Age: 40  
Family: Wife Catherine Bertrand, son Gavin (10)  
Years lived in Salem: 40

Profession: Communication strategist

Elected office experience: None

### JIM ZAVAGLIA

Age: 60  
Family: Wife Marjorie

Years lived in Salem: Lifelong

Profession: Retired

Elected office experience: None

citywide and visitors — our tourists — as well.” But for the park to be used by large events, well-established plans to repair the damage must be in place ahead of time.

“I’m not adversely against the use for a carnival, but I have very, very serious concerns about the maintenance,” Watson-Felt said. “I’m hesitant to support it without knowing there are dedicated funds in place already that’ll feed into the needs of the master plan.”

Blanchette, meanwhile, said he would favor large crowd draws to pack the Common and favored lighter uses like international food festivals. But he felt uses of the Common should be reserved for those specifically in Ward 2.

“It should be left up to the Ward 2 residents,” Blanchette said, “because they have to deal with the parking and the noise issues.”

Contact Dustin Luca at 978-338-2523 or [DLuca@salemnews.com](mailto:DLuca@salemnews.com). Follow him at [facebook.com/dustinluca](https://www.facebook.com/dustinluca) or on Twitter @DustinLucaSN.

ward. They’ve held events there over the years. I can remember it during Heritage Days.”

Watson-Felt agreed with that sentiment, extending it further to say the Common is “enjoyed by residents