

# Local attorney eyes vacant School Board seat

By Scott Bass  
EDITOR

Sam Kaufman says he's been on the sidelines long enough.

A well-known attorney and adviser to county economic development efforts – and a former linebacker for the University of Richmond – Kaufman says he's ready to enter the game: He's submitting his résumé to fill the vacated Midlothian District seat on the School Board.

"I have a passion for this. What I've done so far in the county has dealt with economic development and trying to make the county a better place," Kaufman said, adding that the first of his two daughters recently entered kindergarten at Robious Elementary School. "Now that I have children in school, it's a personal passion."

Kaufman, 36, has a long track record of involvement. He served as chairman of the board for the Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce in 2007 – he was 30, the youngest chairman in the chamber's history. He has also chaired the Chesterfield County Economic Development Advisory Council and served as vice chairman of the Chippenham Place Community Development Authority Board, which issued the bonds to redevelop the former Cloverleaf Mall site. In August, he was appointed to the School Board's Citizen Budget Advisory Committee, and previously worked with the board's comprehensive plan, Design for Excellence 2020.

Kaufman is the second high-profile candidate to submit his application for the seat, which became vacant last month when Patty Carpenter announced she was resigning for health reasons. Jim Schroeder, a former School Board member who served on the



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Sam Kaufman, a local attorney, says his experience working with the School Board on its comprehensive plan, and as a member of the budget advisory committee, would serve him well if he's appointed to replace Patty Carpenter.

board for 14 years, has also expressed interest in replacing Carpenter.

The School Board is accepting applications through Nov. 15. A list of the top candidates for the seat will be announced Nov. 22, and the School Board expects to interview candidates later this month. On Dec. 4, the board expects to announce Carpenter's replacement.

For his part, Kaufman said he's more than ready to serve.

"Schools are one of the major forces driving economic development," Kaufman said, explaining that companies looking for possible locations look for a well-run school system that churns out well-educated, future employees. Good schools, he said, also help keep property values high and help bolster the economy in other ways.

Since the meals tax referendum failed in last week's general election, the county school system is entering a critical phase, Kaufman

said. While voters approved the \$304 million bond referendum to revitalize county schools, in addition to the \$49 million bond referendum to replace an aging 911 system, voters turned back the 2 percent meals tax proposal, which would have helped pay the interest on the bonds.

"What that tells me is that our county wants this stuff. We want schools to be top-notch, but we're not ready to pay for it," Kaufman said. "We are going to have to find that money."

Kaufman, a partner at Owens & Owens, is a business and real estate attorney with a penchant for studying the issues, making a careful assessment, and then working to find a solution without finger-pointing, says Brennen Keene, chairman of the board of directors for the Chesterfield Chamber.

"He's not going to come in with an agenda, other than to do the right thing," Keene said. "He knows how to work well with others to find solutions."

A native of New York, Kaufman's mother was a schoolteacher and his father served on the School Board. Kaufman said he's interested in filling the seat not just temporarily, but long term. He plans to run in the special election next year to fill out the remainder of Carpenter's term, through 2015.

Still, Kaufman said he's approaching the vacancy pragmatically. He's not opposed to supporting someone else for the seat, if a stronger candidate comes along.

"My primary interest is that we get the best possible person for that seat," he said. "That may or may not be me."

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