

## Mayoral Race

By John Keast - Two rural candidates, Bev Tasker and Angus McKay, are lining up to challenge urban candidate Bede O'Malley for the Ashburton mayoralty. If successful, Mrs Tasker, the chair of the council's operations committee, would be Ashburton's first woman mayor. Mrs Tasker has served as a councillor for 18 years and lives at Ruapuna.

Angus McKay, a Methven farmer, was the Rakaia representative on Environment Canterbury before the council's elected members were replaced by commissioners earlier this year.

He has confirmed he will stand as a councillor and is "leaning" toward standing for the mayoralty

Mr McKay has a strong interest in Ashburton local body politics and sometimes sat in on meetings of the district council.

He said he had been approached by a lot of people to stand "and mostly from Ashbrton town, which is interesting";

Mr McKay said he was still reading the situation and would issue a statement closer to election time.

However, one of the main issue that was turning him towards standing for the top job was that, as a citizen, he had watched how the council had gone about its business and believed it could improve its relationship with the people.

As an Ecan councillor, he said, he had a history of getting people involved, whether it was for flood protection, river or other work.

A three-way contest "with rumours more candidates may stand" adds zing to local body elections in October.

At the last election, Mr O'Malley was elected unopposed. There was speculation several months ago that high-profile councillor Kelvin Holmes may seek the top job, but he has ruled that out, citing pressure of business.

Mr O'Malley beat long-term Murray Anderson and has sold his pharmacy interests to concentrate on the mayoralty.

He has been heavily involved in the developing the lauded Canterbury Water Management Strategy, a blueprint for deciding contentious water issues in Canterbury, New Zealand's most-irrigated region.

Mrs Tasker, a councillor for 18 years, said she had had a lot of support for her move, particularly from husband Roger, who also has vast experience in local body politics.

Mrs Tasker said she told Mr O'Malley of her intentions to stand before making her bid public.

"There has been a bit of disquiet and division, and I want to sort that out. There are things I am concerned about, and I have the community interest at heart. We'll see how things play out over the next few months."

Mrs Tasker said she would also stand in the western ward.

This term of council has been a contentious one, with vigorous debate over the merits or otherwise of a \$30m stadium/pool complex for Ashburton, disquiet over proposals to change rural planning rules, and deep concern over a preferred route for a second bridge over the Ashburton River.

The preferred route, Chalmers Ave-Grove St, is not set in stone, but has led to the formation of the Bridge Action Group which opposes the

preferred route and the back-up alternative, a route east of Tinwald.

Residents anywhere near the proposed routes are concerned about falling property values, traffic volume and safety.

Other than mayoral candidates, Ashburton is buzzing with rumours about possible council candidates. Ashburton Art Gallery curator Kathryn Mitchell has confirmed she will seek a seat around the table. Her particular interests are the youth of the district and newcomers to the district.

Angus McKay - one of the Mayoral candidates