

# Pownal candidate night will be held on Feb. 27

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Posted: 02/14/2009 03:02:24 AM EST

Saturday, February 14

POWNAL — The Select Board approved an application this week from Ray Rodrigues, a member of the Communication and Image Committee, to use the Pownal Elementary School gym for a candidate forum. The forum, set for Feb. 27 at 7 p.m., will allow voters to question candidates about town issues and their qualifications.

The forum has been held at the school for the past two years. Rodrigues said the first two times, he only had to apply to the school, but said the rules changed this year, and he must now get the Select Board to approve the meeting at the school first, so it will be covered under the town's insurance.

Rodrigues said the forums began at the same time the Communications and Image Committee was formed. The group, along with other committees, was created when the town embarked on a town-wide planning project.

"Many people felt that they didn't know what was going on in town," he said, adding that outside of what was printed in the local newspaper, the town was in the dark on what was happening.

Rodrigues said plans are being made to have the forums aired on CAT-TV, although probably not live. The forums have been a success, he said, adding that there was standing room only the first time, when the event was held in the school's library. He said the forums have been generally civil, and as moderator, he keeps the discussion flowing.

The forums have been wide-ranging, with citizens asking about everything from ATV trail proposals to residents of flooded-out trailer parks being allowed to use the school's showers. Rodrigues said he normally asks each candidate a question to give each a chance to speak, but then opens the session up to the public.

The challenge this year, he said, will be handling the number of candidates. Three are running for two open spots on the school board, four are running for the position of town constable, and four are running for two one-year terms on the Select Board. Those are the contested races. Rodrigues said any candidate up for re-election, contested or not, is invited to answer questions at the forum.

He said the Select Board tends to receive the most questions, while those running for constable tend to have the least. Rodrigues predicted that this year, the school budget and property taxes will be foremost on people's minds.

The forums are not the committee's only method of getting information to the public. He said it is also responsible for the creation of the Pownal Wiki ([pownal.pbwiki.com/](http://pownal.pbwiki.com/)), a Web site that uses the same software as Wikipedia, allowing people to edit the content of the site.

He said anyone can add to the Pownal Wiki, not just residents. He said he has no problem giving the password to anyone, and he is able to track edits to prevent abuse.

The site has Select Board minutes, Rep. Bill Botzow's "Montpelier Notes" and a Pownal crime report. He said most activity on the site is from the photo section.

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