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Arlington Democrats to hold five debates for County Board opening

By Patricia Sullivan

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Arlington County Democrats will hold five debates this month for the candidates seeking the party's nomination to fill the County Board seat being vacated by Chris Zimmerman.

Peter Fallon, Alan Howze and Cord Thomas have announced they want the endorsement in the heavily Democratic county. But they are not the only contenders: John Vihstadt, a Republican is running as an independent, and Libertarian Evan Bernick announced Jan. 1 that he, too, wants to join the five-member board.

Bernick, who moved to Arlington in 2011 after graduating from the University of Chicago Law School, is a legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, and a legal associate at the Cato Institute.

The Democrats will hold their debates once a week until their "firehouse caucus," which will be Jan. 30 at Key Elementary School, and Feb. 1 at Kenmore Middle School. The Democrats are using a new process for choosing their nominee this year: Instead of voting a single choice, voters will be asked to rank their candidates in order of preference. Votes are then tallied by preference until a candidate receives more than 50 percent of votes.

The first Democratic debate will be Jan. 8, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, 4301 Wilson Blvd. Others will be Jan 18, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Campbell School's multi-purpose room, 737 South Carlin Springs Rd.; Jan. 23, from 8 to 9 p.m. at Glebe School's multi-purpose room, 1770 North Glebe Rd.; and Jan. 27, 8 to 9 p.m. at Drew School's multi-purpose room, 3500 South 23rd St.

The Arlington Young Democrats will sponsor a separate debate Jan. 15 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The Democratic nominee will face other candidates in a special election to be set for this spring by the Circuit Court. That date has not yet been announced, but is likely to occur in March or April. Whoever wins the general election will hold the seat only until November, when its term expires and another election is held.