

Candidates in San Rafael, Novato juggling key issues



Dick Spotswood
COLUMNIST

Nine of Marin's 11 cities and towns have elections for council members in the fast-approaching Nov. 3 election. Last week, I wrote that in Sausalito, Ross, Corte Madera and Larkspur, a single issue dominates the election.

In the five other communities, there's a combination of concerns that voters must address. One is the risk of wildland fire and the availability of escape routes in the worst-case scenario.

Novato and San Rafael elect their five-member city councils by geographical districts. Two of the districts in each city have council terms expiring.

In District 2, which encompasses the city's western portions including Sun Valley, the incumbent, Eli Hill, is unopposed. Thus

he will be automatically reelected.

In District 3, which includes downtown and the city's southwest, incumbent Maribeth Bushey isn't running for reelection. Two well-qualified candidates are vying for the post: business owner Daryoush Davidi and attorney/planning commissioner Robert Sandoval.

The issues include high-rise apartment buildings that will soon dominate the city's center. While the bulk of San Rafael residents are outraged, understand that the City Council and Mayor Kate Colin aren't the cause. They were approved due to the "build, baby, build" mindset that dominates California's Legislature.

Local control of zoning has evaporated. The best any council can do is manage its impact. The positive view is that concerns over the downtown's economic vitality will be aided by the tidal wave of new residences.

The Mission City ballot has Measure W, which would significantly increase the real estate

parcel transfer tax. The city promises that its proceeds will go to enhancing public safety, though it is open-ended as to providing for "essential services" and to repairing aging infrastructure. Davidi is for Measure W. Sandoval told the IJ, "I'd support Measure W if my understanding is correct that the council, including myself if elected, will decide necessary funding for the fire department."

In western Novato's District 4, which runs from downtown to the western city limit, veteran council member and past Mayor Pat Eklund is opposed by Dan Christian, pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, homebuilder Chris Carpinello and Luigino Galletto, a bilingual entertainment industry strategist. They agree on enhancing Novato's economic vitality and providing more affordable housing, yet there are differences among the candidates in both districts.

An example is the future of the city-owned Marin Valley Mobile County Club in southeastern

Novato. It's occupied by seniors and lower income folks.

Rod Wood, Novato's city manager when the property was acquired in 1997, wrote to the council that the plan was for the city to borrow money to purchase the property. Then, a resident-controlled nonprofit would collect dues to pay the loan and common area upkeep. No taxpayer money would be involved. When the loan is paid off next year, the nonprofit would take over ownership guaranteeing the housing remains "affordable."

Unfortunately, the paperwork trail is vague. City Manager Amy Cunningham now recommends the city indefinitely retain ownership, effectively saying to the residents, "trust us." Eklund, who was a council member when Marin Valley was acquired, Carpinello and Galletto all side with the elderly, low-income residents. Candidate Christian differs, telling the IJ editorial board, "The city is right to keep it."

In Northwestern Novato's

District 2, current Mayor Rachel Farac is running for reelection. Also in the race are a pair of Pacific Gas & Electric employees: distribution design engineer Mike Little and electronic incident investigator Bob Rasmussen.

On Marin Valley, Little says. "The city should keep its word it gave, not quietly hold on to the park as a permanent asset." Rasmussen supports a plan to give the park tenants greater autonomy. When Farac was queried by the IJ about Marin Valley, her "top priority is making sure the park remains long-term affordable housing for seniors." Few on either side disagree with that goal. How to do so remains unstated.

Next week, I plan to look at upcoming council races in San Anselmo, Fairfax and Tiburon along with ballot measures in Mill Valley, San Rafael and Sausalito.

Columnist Dick Spotswood of Mill Valley writes on local issues Sundays and Wednesdays. Email him at spotswood@comcast.net.