

Chico council candidates speak up in election season's first forum

By Ashiah Scharaga, *Enterprise-Record*

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Chico >> Wednesday morning was all about getting to know this year's City Council candidates.

The Chico Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Chico Business Association hosted a forum at the Chico Community Center, the first of this election season.

Ten of the 11 candidates running for the four open seats were present. They fielded questions about cooperation, homelessness, funding infrastructure and police, economic growth and a lack of health care

providers.

The candidates fielded five questions in the span of 1 1/2 hours. The forum was recorded by BCAC TV and will be uploaded to its [YouTube channel](#) later this week. Questions and answers asked of the candidates by the audience will be posted on chicochamber.com.

New candidates

Karl Ory, former mayor and airport commissioner, emphasized the need for expanding affordable family rentals in the city, and that public safety organizations need a lot more resources to focus on vagrancy.

He also mentioned that annexation is a concern. The city has been adding thousands of people without really looking at if it has enough resources, he said.

Jobs are Ory's No. 1 priority, he said. He said commercial air service is key to bringing jobs to Chico, because without it, the city is isolated. Focusing on health care and private sector affordable housing can also help bring employers to Chico.

Lisa Duarte, client experience coordinator at Valley Oak Veterinary Center, said the council needs to bring in outside ideas to improve — from the Chico community as well as from other cities.

She said she sympathizes with homeless people, and envisions a housing project supported by the city where homeless people would have a place to stay that is away from downtown and commercial districts.

To make businesses want to come here, the city has to be made more attractive, she said. That's where gathering input from other cities can come into play.

Jeffrey Glatz said to expand the economy, the city needs to take advantage of Chico State University and focus on bringing in people who will protect the community and millennials who will live here long-term.

When it comes to encouraging doctors to come to Chico, the quality of life has to be the most important thing. He stressed the need for "above-average" staffing for the Chico Police Department, and was not satisfied with

public safety. He said partnerships with the Jesus Center and Torres Shelter are important to maintain when discussing homelessness.

Jon Scott, a downtown businessman, said the solution for addressing infrastructure and police staffing needs are to spend money in those areas. He said people do not like taxes, but there has to be a conversation with citizens: “What are we willing to do to pay for it?”

He suggested the university explore becoming a poly-technical university to bring more jobs to the area, and said the city is not very business friendly, sharing a story about delays he experienced with permitting. To bring doctors to Chico, he said, the downtown area needs to be cleaned up and a medical facility put in one of the empty buildings downtown.

Loretta Torres said good ideas “should not have a position of left or right.” Torres used an example of when she was designing her home with her husband: They found when they worked together they came up with an idea neither had thought of that was better than what they had before. That exemplifies her approach, should she be elected.

She said safety on the streets, provided by a balanced budget, is important to foster growth of businesses. Then more businesses will come because they will like the environment of Chico.

Jovanni Tricerri, North Valley Community Foundation director of community engagement, said to create more jobs, the city has to support current local businesses and help them grow and attract new businesses. Family spaces need to be created, like the Chico Children’s Museum, of which he is a board member.

Money spent on housing subsidies far outweighs how much is being directed to public safety, he said. While housing is important, people can get housing if they want it. The city is not where it needs to be when it comes to public safety, he said. He supports the community policing model and fully staffing the Police Department. He highlighted his writing of the 2014 police staffing plan, adopted by the council.

Candidate Mercedes Macias, 26, was absent from the meeting. She works three jobs and sympathizes with citizens who want to participate in government but are having a hard time making ends meet. She said her time could be better spent watching the video of the event and preparing.

“I want to make a statement that just because people cannot go physically to a meeting does not mean they shouldn’t be involved in the democratic process,” she said. “It doesn’t mean their vote shouldn’t be counted.”

Incumbents

Councilor Tami Ritter said the council is already working together, an example being the two-year development of an alcoholic beverage policy that involved considerable input from the music industry and business owners. Ritter said she’s not sure the budget can be tightened any more than it already has been and emphasized utilizing systems like CopLogic, which focus on responding to public safety concerns.

On the topic of homelessness, she said there is not enough housing. “If we are serious about addressing homelessness, we will stop criminalizing it,” she said.

She mentioned her commitment to the trees and environment of Chico as well.

Vice Mayor Sean Morgan emphasized keeping Chico clean, safe and financially secure. He highlighted the council’s successes in prioritizing public safety and paying off the deficit.

To address the city’s homeless issues, the council has passed the sit and lie ordinance, offenses against public property ordinance, and bolstered the Target Team, all initiatives he supported.

Morgan said raising taxes isn’t the way to go when fostering economic growth — it chases people out of town. He thinks Chico isn’t friendly to businesses, and regulatory and tax uncertainty have been job killers.

Councilor Ann Schwab said the current council is united on its priorities, including public safety. To address infrastructure and police staffing needs, the focus needs to be on expanding the economy. The key to economic success in Chico is its partnerships with organizations like the Chamber, DCBA and university, she said.

On the topic of homelessness, she said the city needs to focus on finding housing first, which costs less than police calls and hospital stays. “A person cannot build a life until they have a home,” she said.

Councilor Randall Stone said he has a history of “reaching across the aisle,” including the butane honey oil ordinance discussion he brought to the council that was later adopted, and his help in forming the Butte County Jail alternative custody program. As Sacramento Valley Division president for League of California Cities, Stone said he has learned that fighting homelessness has to be a countywide effort.

Stone said he pushed for pension and pay reform, which has freed up money the city can use elsewhere. He also said he helped create 75 full-time jobs in sanitary housing, supported the payoff of the deficit and Chico police staffing plan the council adopted.

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