



Warnell Coats
... likely new mayor.

East Palo Alto set to select Coats mayor

By Michael Shapiro
Times Tribune staff

East Palo Alto Councilman Warnell Coats appears set to become the city's next mayor at a special council meeting scheduled for today at 6 p.m.

Council members Pat Johnson, Bill Vines and Coats indicated they would vote for Coats at the special meeting.

Johnson would not comment specifically on the vote, but said she "always supports Mr. Coats be-

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cause he is a kind and honest man."

During the past several weeks, Coats and ousted Mayor John Bostic have been battling for the mayor's seat.

Vice Mayor Bill Vines became acting mayor last week after the council deadlocked 2-2 between Coats, who was ousted as vice mayor, and Bostic.

Bostic is on a teaching assignment in the West Indies and could not be reached for comment.

Councilwoman Barbara Mouton, who defended Bostic when the council voted last week to oust him, was outraged that council members planned to appoint a mayor while Bostic is absent.

"It's a despicable act," she said. "For them to do this behind his back is indicative of the slimy characters that they are."

About 120 people showed support for Bostic at last week's meeting, cheering for the former mayor and denouncing those who voted to oust him.

Bostic pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor election code violation earlier this month.

Asked if he was concerned about a backlash from Bostic supporters, Coats said he is not worried.

Vines said he did not expect further reaction. "We got all the reaction we'll get."

At last week's meeting Vines did not vote for either Coats or Bostic, leaving the council deadlocked.

Vines said he met with Coats this week and gained a better understanding of his positions, and now feels comfortable in voting for Coats.

Vines is confident that Coats understands that the mayor's "sole responsibility is to carry forth the agenda of the City Council," he said. "It's a real relief."

The council called the special meeting to consider possible November ballot initiatives, including proposals for a tax override, a utility users tax, and vacancy decontrol, which would allow landowners to increase rent when a rental unit is vacated.

The idea, a modification of the city's rent stabilization law, was

submitted by developer Joe Simitian.

It states:

- A unit may be offered at "fair market rent," when a tenant voluntarily leaves.

- Once a unit is rented to a new tenant, the first month's rent would become the new rent ceiling.

- Vacancy decontrol will not apply if a tenant is evicted, unless the eviction is due to non-payment of rent.

- A decrease in services or harassment designed to force an involuntary relocation would be illegal.

- Civil and criminal penalties for violations of the city's rent control law would be strengthened.

- At least 20 percent of apartments in each rental building must remain fully controlled at their original base rent, to preserve some affordable housing for low-income renters.

Simitian called the proposal a "genuine compromise" that would create a development climate in East Palo Alto conducive to the construction of new rental housing.

It would expand the city's housing supply and increase its tax base, he said.

Acting Rent Stabilization Director Sherry Sykes questioned keeping only 20 percent of apartments at the current base level.

"Is this a fair figure?" she asked in a city report. "If not, what would the city's response be to increased overcrowding and homelessness?"

The council will also consider a tax override measure to improve city services, with most funds going to the city's Police Department, which suffered severe staff cuts last year.

The amount of funds generated over the four-year life of the tax would depend on how much the council decides to tax each residential and commercial parcel.

For example, if the council proposed a \$250 tax on each house and an \$800 tax on each commercial property, it would raise \$1.2 million, approximately a 23 percent supplement to the city's \$5.1 million annual budget.

The money could be divided among police services, public works and possibly other city services.

The council plans to consider another possible ballot measure on the utility users tax.