

East Palo Alto stadium not top priority

City, crime first concerns of council

By Mary T. Fortney
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The changing of the guard will take place in East Palo Alto on Monday when Mayor James E. Blakey Jr. and Vice Mayor Ruben Abrica step down and the newly elected members take their place on the City Council.

William "Bill" Vines most likely will become mayor, if the tradition of giving the post to the highest vote-getter is followed. Vines said Wednesday he wouldn't like to see the tradition broken.

Also new to the council will be Pat Johnson, a businesswoman and

active supporter of the senior citizens' center and United Homeowners of East Palo Alto.

Warnell Coats, an incumbent re-elected to a four-year term, already has his place at the council table.

The new council members are eager to get in and begin putting their campaign promises into effect.

The proposed Giants stadium isn't high on their agenda.

Coats isn't making up his mind until more information on the combined stadium-industrial park is available.

Vines wants to deal with the critical needs of the city before taking on mega-projects.

Johnson said that when she was out precinct walking, she didn't hear about the stadium. Instead, people were talking about crime and drugs.

The man behind the push for a stadium in East Palo Alto said his task force will move ahead with the plan, despite the expression of doubts by the election winners.

"I don't see (the election) as affecting (the stadium project) at all," said Brain Swartz, who heads

San Mateo County's stadium task force.

"I think we have to bring the two new City Council members up to speed," Swartz said. "They're both business people and I'm sure they'll understand the value of a mixed use project."

East Palo Alto has emerged as the leading candidate for a Peninsula stadium, and Swartz's group is proposing a development that would include a marina, hotel and retail and commercial office space on a 200-acre site.

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But after a meeting two weeks ago between East Palo Alto leaders and representatives of the Hunters Point community who said Candlestick Park has not revived their economically depressed area, Vines and Coats said they had even more doubts about the stadium proposal. But Swartz insists the stadium is only part of the proposal. "We're not just talking about the stadium here," he said. "We're talking about redeveloping all of East Palo Alto."

Priorities for the three election winners center on making the city a more livable place for residents, attacking drugs and crime and pushing for economic development.

Coats, after two years, knows what a difficult job faces the council in trying to effect change and improve the city's financial situation.

"That's why I ran again," he said. "It's a challenge. I wanted to come back and give it another

shot."

He came back with reinforcements. Johnson said, "Our game plan was to get majority control."

Councilman John Bostic also is expected to work cooperatively with the new majority.

Councilwoman Barbara Mouton will be in the minority, but all three stressed the council should be a good working group.

Mouton said Wednesday, "I don't see myself as a minority of one."

She said she is interested in the same issues as the others.

"It wasn't Warnell Coats who blew the whistle on the fiscal crisis," she said. "In December 1986 I suspected a problem and wanted to bring in a fiscal expert but couldn't get support for it."

Mouton blamed the defeat of longtime incumbents Blakey and Abrica on "the way the fiscal crisis was portrayed in the media and the big bucks coming from the absentee landlords. It was clearly written on the wall what was going to happen."

She charged that Vines, Coats and Johnson met with the Palo Alto Park Association, a group of landlords, and received financial sup-

port from them. Blakey and Abrica, as supporters of rent control, did not get support from apartment owners.

All three winners freely acknowledged they had met with apartment owners, but emphasized they also had met with people from the industrial park and with all the different constituencies in the community.

"The landlords are part of the community," Johnson said.

Vines said, "All players should be part of the solution rather than being a problem. We must give the same consideration to all, and all people must have access to city government."

Coats, who irritated some people by releasing information on the city's financial problems, intends to continue letting the public in on what's happening in the city.

Coats plans first to get a handle on the city's financial picture and disclose to the community what has happened in the past five years. He wants to make sure sound fiscal management policies are in place before too long.

He favors selective economic development and likes the De Monet

Industries redevelopment project. Decisions still have to be made about the height of the proposed buildings, but Coats pointed out that East Palo Alto, with its small land area, can't spread out, so it has to look at highrises.

Vines gives top priority to expanding police services and second rank to doing something about the city's financial condition.

He stressed the need for job training for youths, adult education and recreation programs for children. He said the city manager would spend his time better on getting the streets cleaned up than on pursuing mega-projects.

Johnson also gives top priority to improving police services, especially support services, and to a stronger anti-drug, anti-crime program.

A private agenda that she hasn't talked about much yet is to focus on women's issues.

"No one is speaking out on this, and I see it as a concern," she said. "East Palo Alto has a large population of single women who are heads of households, and the commissions in place are not addressing their needs."