

12-22-86

A-8—TIMES TRIBUNE

PAMPHLET FILE

**TimesTribune**

Palo Alto, Calif. 94301

Peter E. Heraty, *President and Chief Executive Officer*Michael G. Kidder, *Editor*William L. Harke,  
*Executive News Editor*Paul Voakes,  
*Editorial Page Editor*Donald D. Thornton,  
*Metropolitan Editor*

## The post-Howell era

**F**RED HOWELL leaves behind some sizable shoes to fill as he reluctantly leaves the post of East Palo Alto city manager. Also left behind is a narrow City Council majority that owes residents an explanation for its decision to force Howell out.

Mayor Barbara Mouton and her council allies also must find a replacement who has the vision and strength to effect the many changes East Palo Alto needs to mature as a city.

Howell, the young city's first manager, showed in 2½ years that he could handle day-to-day matters reasonably and professionally. He had visions of making improvements that may have seemed unrealistic considering the community's generally poor financial state, but he succeeded in areas where local leaders had been frustrated in the past, such as parks and recreation and police service improvements.

Howell appeared to have won the respect of his fellow city employees, which goes a long way toward creating the enthusiasm necessary to solve East Palo Alto's various problems. But he failed to win over Mouton and Councilmen Ruben Abrica and James Blakey, who caused the 3-2 vote last week for a "buyout" offered in exchange for Howell's resignation.

It is troubling to hear that Howell's

biggest problem was not his alleged failure to successfully promote community development, but his personality clash with Mouton and her council allies. Such a clash, however, cannot justify the cost of jettisoning Howell. The \$45,000 severance pay and retirement benefits paid to Howell, along with the \$45,000 or so the city likely will have to pay to his successor, is a high price for a city that needs every dollar it can find to deal with crime, blight, business development and other difficult problems.

The controversy surrounding Howell's departure is particularly troublesome because East Palo Alto's future as a city still is in doubt. The validity of the 1983 incorporation election may be considered next year by the U.S. Supreme Court. If the court decides to hear the case, East Palo Alto will be placed in a national spotlight.

Now, this attention may come just as the city staff is having to cope with either an interim or a new administration.

If its future is to be bright, the East Palo Alto government must present itself well not only to its own community but to the business community, higher levels of government and other interests who can play a decisive role. While matters related to the Howell ouster cannot be altered now, the council now must demonstrate convincing leadership.