

Watsonville council election postponed

EQ 189 - Wats. Rebuilding

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WATSONVILLE — With the scars from last week's earthquake still vivid in everyone's mind, the City Council voted unanimously Monday afternoon to postpone the November council election until Dec. 5.

A majority of council candidates who attended a special meeting at City Hall also supported the 30-day postponement on a straw vote of 6-4.

City Clerk Lorraine Washington recommended the one-month delay, citing five reasons.

- She said sample ballots haven't been mailed to registered voters and roughly 1,000 people have been displaced from their homes and are unable to receive their ballots.

- Three polling places have been badly damaged and will be unusable by Nov. 7, when the election had been scheduled. The damaged buildings are Redding Title, a Baptist Church and the YWCA.

- Many election workers are elderly and have been forced out of their homes. Washington said they are not willing or are incapable of helping with the election.

- Lastly, city employees have been devoting 18-hour days to the crisis and they will not be able to assist in the election effort, she said.

"There's no precedent for this kind of disaster (in the election laws)," said Washington. The Secretary of State's office and the Sequoia Pacific Co., which printed the ballots and helps in the official counting, were consulted and agreed that whatever decision the

council made would be accepted.

The postponement will not cost the city much additional money, as a different election date can be stamped on the sample ballot and an insert can be placed inside advising voters of a change in polling places, Washington said.

Cruz Gomez, a candidate in District 1 (westside) and one of three plaintiffs in a lawsuit which forced the city to hold the special election by district voting, urged the council to not delay the election more than two weeks.

"We're feeling the need to get on as soon as possible," Gomez said. "I would like to ask for a two-week postponement."

She said in another month, critical decisions will have been made on the future of the city which the Latino community and council candidates should be

consulted on.

Councilman Tony Campos, a candidate in District 6 (Brewington) suggested the council hold an informational meeting with the candidates, to bring them up to speed on the developments following the earthquake.

An emotional Rebecca Garcia, president of the League for United -Latin American Citizens, pointed out that Dec. 5 would be a time when migrant workers who are eligible to vote would be gone. She asked the council not to delay the election a month.

But the majority of council members and candidates felt that the time was not right for an election.

"I think a little time would bring an election back into focus," said Mayor Betty Murphy, who's running in District 6 against Campos.