



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Third District Supervisor Neal Coonerty says he will not run for re-election.

Coonerty won't seek third term

Supervisor's decision opens up 2014 race for 3rd District seat

Board of Supervisors

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County Supervisor Neal Coonerty won't seek re-election in 2014, deciding to step away after 12 years in politics for other pursuits.

Coonerty chairs the Board of Supervisors and, as the now retired proprietor of the 40-year-old Bookshop Santa Cruz, is a seminal figure in Santa Cruz life. Coonerty's decision also should set in motion a scramble for his seat, with the election not likely heating up until early next year.

"I've been thinking it over the last several weeks, and I've decided not to run again when my term is up," said Coonerty, noting that he will be approaching 69 years old by the time the next supervisor is sworn in in January 2015.

Coonerty will have served eight years on the board after four on the Santa Cruz City Council, including a year as mayor. He has helped broker a settlement clearing the way for UCSC to grow, pushed for improvements at Davenport Beach and advocated funding for a Serial Inebriates Program and the Maintaining Ongoing Stability through Treatment, a mental illness outreach program.

He also has been a voice for improving the local economy, pushing the county to focus on economic development and supporting an ill-fated effort to build a controversial beachfront La Bahia Hotel.

"For us, sometimes other priorities have overshadowed economic development," Coonerty said during a 2011 county board meeting. "And I think it's time to take a turn."

Coonerty said he is looking forward to final approval for a suite of Twin Lakes beachfront improvements, which goes before the California Coastal Commission next month. And he wants to bring the county's nascent economic development efforts to fruition.

"It's not going to be an easy landing," Coonerty said. "It's going to be a charge to the end, I think."

As co-owner of a beloved local bookstore, Coonerty was known long before he got into politics.

COONERTY

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Bookshop Santa Cruz was already an eclectic place when he and his expecting wife took it over 40 years ago — it once had a water bed in the middle of it, and Coonerty later chased down a shoplifting nun — and it survived tragedy when the earthquake of 1989 struck.

The bookstore outlasted a challenge from now-defunct Crown Books, which moved across the street in the late 1990s. It also bettered a Borders bookstore, which shuttered its downtown store in 2011 under a mountain of debt.

Through the fire, Bookshop became a rallying point for the national debate over threats to local bookstores. Coonerty was twice named

president of the American Booksellers Association, and the store's survival is seen by many as a symbol of Santa Cruz' preference for local businesses over large chain stores.

Larry Pearson, founder of Pacific Cookie Co., has known Coonerty for several decades and joked his friend is "untrustworthy" on his retirement decisions, noting Coonerty has been out of politics and returned before.

"When he's serving he's damn good. He's served his district very well," Pearson said. "He's an absolutely savvy politician. He's Irish-Catholic and I think that's where that comes from."

The 3rd supervisorial district seat usually belongs to someone who emerges from the Santa Cruz City Council. Potential candidates include Santa Cruz City

Councilwoman Lynn Robinson and former Councilman and Mayor Ryan Coonerty, who is Neal's son.

Reached Tuesday, Ryan Coonerty said he was lining up support for an announcement on his plans. Robinson also said she would have a formal announcement in the near future, adding that she looked forward to exploring the opportunity.

UCSC coordinator Chris Krohn, who previously challenged Coonerty for the seat, and Santa Cruz Councilman Don Lane both said they would not run.

"I think public service is important," Neal Coonerty said. "It's very fulfilling working in a local office. ... You get to problem-solve things that improve the lives of people."

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NEAL COONERTY,
3rd District supervisor