

WATSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Alejo, Bilicich named mayor, vice mayor



ALEJO



BILICICH

mayors

By DONNA JONES

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WATSONVILLE — Two Watsonville natives will lead the City Council in a town hard hit by foreclosures and unemployment.

The City Council chose Luis

Alejo mayor on a 5-2 vote and Nancy Bilicich mayor pro tem on a 6-1 vote after a lengthy discussion on the fairness of the process.

The annual ritual of selecting the two leaders from among its ranks often splits the council and leaves political rancor in

its wake.

“We’ve got to work together as a team,” Alejo said in his first remarks as mayor. “We’re going to get the city back on the right track and we’re going to do it together.”

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MAYOR

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Councilman Emilio Martinez dissented in both votes. He backed Councilman Greg Caput for mayor but was unable to get a second for his nomination.

Martinez, who hopes to collect enough signatures to put a proposal giving voters the right to elect a mayor on the ballot, recalled how the late Dale Skillicorn was never selected mayor during nearly two terms on the

council. He said after serving nearly four years, Caput should have the chance to be mayor.

“This isn’t about who is qualified. I think anybody up here is qualified,” Martinez said. “It’s about the process and it stinks.”

Caput also criticized the process, noting that his predecessor from District 5, Ramon Gomez, also never was chosen mayor.

“I’m assuming he probably made someone angry and got skipped over,” Caput said.

He said the people in Wat-

sonville don’t like the way their leaders are chosen, and though gathering signatures is difficult, if Martinez’s proposal gets on the ballot, “it would pass overwhelmingly without even campaigning.”

Councilman Manuel Bersamin called the council’s selection “democratic” and “fair” but said the issue Tuesday wasn’t the process but who would be the best leaders.

“This evening is about choosing the mayor and the mayor pro tem for what I would consider the great-

est financial crisis this city has faced since the Great Depression,” said Bersamin, who supported Alejo for mayor.

Several speakers also urged the council to pick Alejo.

“He’s homegrown, a Watsonville graduate who went on to UC, went to Harvard and returned home,” said Rhea DeHart, who worked with Alejo on the Planning Commission. “He’s a workaholic. You get communications from him at 2 o’clock in the morning. You wonder when this man sleeps.”