

Watsonville nearly certain to get Hispanic councilman

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The players are set for the City Council election in May, and barring a successful write-in campaign, Watsonville is guaranteed its first Hispanic council member.

With three council seats open and just two non-Hispanic candidates, it's certain at least one of the three Hispanic candidates will be elected.

It will be the first time a Hispanic has been elected to the council in a city that elected its first woman representative just a decade ago.

It's possible all three could be elected, which would be an ironic circumstance since the city endured a costly lawsuit this year that claimed its election system prevented Hispanics from being elected to public office.

The filing deadline for council candidates was yesterday.

The final list of council can-

didates includes: incumbent Councilman Vido Deretich, the manager of a cold-storage plant; local real estate agent and Planning Commissioner Tony Campos; builder Leo Estrada; salesman and onetime Youth Services counselor Juan Morales; and Dennis Osmer, who works for a Gilroy beverage distributor.

The three candidates for mayor are Salinas High School instructional media supervisor Robert Chacanaca; City Councilman Rex Clark, a real estate appraiser; and Councilwoman Betty Murphy.

There was some last-minute excitement at the filing deadline yesterday. City Clerk Lorraine Washington said Estrada submitted his papers at 4:58 p.m.

Had Estrada walked into the clerk's office three minutes later, Washington said, he couldn't have been included on the ballot. State election laws specify a 5 p.m. deadline, she

said.

Estrada is the only one who has yet to qualify officially as a candidate, because the signatures supporting his candidacy haven't been checked. Each candidate must submit the signatures of 20 registered city voters. The signatures must be authenticated by the clerk.

Washington said this morning she expects to know by tonight if Estrada has qualified. Estrada submitted 24 signatures. If five or more aren't registered voters and city residents, he would be out of the race.

Even if Estrada doesn't qualify, he could become a write-in candidate. The deadline for filing for write-ins is April 28.

Washington said she'll hear today from the Secretary of State how the candidates' names will be listed on the ballots May 12. The state uses a lottery system to determine the order, she said.