

Montesino elected as mayor

mayors *RP 12-1-11*
Rios chosen as vice mayor; Montesino discusses plans for term in office

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The Watsonville City Council on Tuesday unanimously elected newcomer Eduardo Montesino as mayor, and Oscar Rios, who has served multiple terms since 1989, as vice mayor.

A handful of community members, none of whom opposed the nominations, addressed the council during the brief meeting.

Rhea DeHart pointed to Montesino's involvement in the community during his time as

vice mayor, and said he is well known in the community.

"I wholeheartedly support the nomination of Eduardo Montesino for mayor," she said. "I think he's done an outstanding job."

Former councilman Antonio Rivas said Montesino is "humble" and a good listener who will respect the opinions of others.

"I think Eduardo would be a great mayor to represent our city," Rivas said.

Councilman Lowell Hurst

acknowledged that the 36-year-old Montesino is younger than the average mayor, but said he is "likable and full of energy."

"He is genuine, and that's a rare quality these days," Hurst added.

Montesino, who lives with his wife and three children, said he migrated to the U.S. from Guanajuato, Mexico, when he was 8, and lived in the Beach Flats in Santa Cruz, an area he said experiences gang and violence problems similar to those in Watsonville.

"I've only been a U.S. citizen for five years, so this is a tremendous accomplishment for a person like me," he said.

Montesino said he wants to work on education issues, and pointed to the large number of students dropping out of high school. He said he wants to encourage young people to be involved in politics by establishing a council for teens.

He apologized to his family for his position as vice mayor

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Todd Guild/Register-Pajaronian

Watsonville Mayor Daniel Dodge (left) congratulates Eduardo Montesino after he was elected mayor Tuesday night.



Todd Guild/Register-Pajaronian

Watsonville City Councilman Lowell Hurst (left) congratulates newly elected Vice Mayor Oscar Rios.

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and his job as a Metro bus driver keeping him away from home.

"This is for you," he said, addressing his children. "This is for your future and for the other kids."

"This year will be a great year for Watsonville, but we have to work together," he said.

Rios, who sat on the council for 15 years and was re-elected last year to fill the seat left vacant by Bill Neighbors, has served as mayor four times and vice mayor six times. He served from 1989 until 2000, and from 2004 to 2008.

"To be given the honor again to serve the city is really fulfilling," he said.

When Rios was elected by the council, Dodge tipped his hat to Rios' years of community service.

"You've been a leader, you've been an advocate, and now it's time to be a mentor," he said.

Bersamin said Rios has been involved in Watsonville politics since Watsonville cannery workers went on strike in 1985.

"Oscar came to help, and he stayed," Bersamin said. "He left his family to come help us. He dedicated himself to make

Watsonville a better place."

Community member Elias Alonzo praised the council for its mayoral choices.

"With this nomination," he said, "we have hit the jackpot."

Before the election process, Dodge addressed the packed council chambers after he was presented with a ceremonial gavel presented to outgoing mayors.

"I'm really proud to have this gavel because it represents my life for the past year," he said.

Dodge's fellow council members also spoke glowingly of the outgoing mayor.

"Daniel Dodge was the most dedicated mayor I have seen since I have been on this council," said Councilman Manuel Bersamin.

Montesino, who said he had no background in politics when he joined the council last year, said Dodge was a mentor to him.

"This man has been a friend to me for more than a year," he said. "He's showed me the way to politics."

Dodge said he has supported a "green way of thinking" during his time as mayor, and has been involved with the city's ongoing broadband project.

He also said he will continue to advocate for the Salsipuedes Levee project and for transportation issues.