



Candidate Sue Groff announces she wants on the City Council.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

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3-1-89

SANTA CRUZ — Faced with a newly revived candidate and her supporters, the newly diminished Santa Cruz City Council declined to appoint a replacement Tuesday for ex-Councilman Mo Reich, who resigned last week.

The council decided to put off appointing Reich's replacement until March 28, but only after once-and-future candidate Susan Groff, who finished fifth in the race for four seats last November, tossed her hat into the ring.

Backed by loud applause and several dozen supporters, Groff asked the council to "adhere to the democratic process and appoint me."

But Councilman John Laird, one of four progressives left on the council since Reich was prodded by supporters into resigning, said that

No quick pick by council

Groff and her supporters were "fairly well organized" for their point of view, but that the council wanted to hear from a wide spectrum of candidates.

Laird also pointedly noted that Groff finished far behind the first four finishers. What he left unspoken was that progressives finished one, two and four in the election, with conservative John Mahaney winning a seat with a third-place finish.

Groff, who owns a luggage store on the Pacific Garden Mall, is a registered Democrat, but describes herself as "independent," not progressive or conservative. Most of her views in the recently concluded campaign, however, were more in line with other conservative candidates than the three progressives.

Reich finished fourth with 9,599 votes, more than 2,400 ahead of Groff, who was more than

550 ahead of the sixth-place finisher, Ed Porter.

Reich resigned Friday, after admitting he had sent an obscene valentine card to Scotts Valley Mayor Glennon Culwell. Reich had earlier denied sending the card. He also gave another obscene card to another former council candidate, Steve Hartman, who was trying to recall him from office for his vote against the city inviting the U.S. Navy to send a ship to Santa Cruz next Fourth of July.

The Hartman card was co-signed by fellow progressives Don Lane and Jane Yokoyama, who joined Laird and Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt Tuesday in opposing Groff's appointment. Groff was nominated by Mahaney and Councilman Joe Ghio. The majority decision was greeted by boos and jeers from the crowd that had showed up in support of Groff. Several defeated

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council candidates also were there, including Porter, Don Webber, Dave Steeves and Jane Imler.

Instead the council heeded a process recommended to it by Wormhoudt, which will keep the city from having to hold a costly, time-consuming special election. It entails:

- The City Clerk advertising that a position is open;
- Written applications accepted through Friday, March 17 and distributed to council members at the end of that business day;
- Holding a special meeting at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 21, to hear presentations by candidates;
- And appointing the new member at the council's regular meeting of March 28.

Groff, however, told the council that it was "more logical" to appoint her, since her "real politics" were in the "best interests of all of Santa Cruz."

She said she regretted the Reich incidents, and that it was "time for

us to stop playing, 'I'm the good guy, you're the bad guy.'"

Longtime political activist Bob Lissner also urged the council to appoint Groff, saying it was the "only fair" thing to do. "She worked hard... she faced the people," Lissner said.

The self-described "independent populist" said he wanted the city to regain "some respect."

Mahaney, who was appointed himself to the council in his first term in 1973, said Groff should be appointed since it had been less than four months since the election. Ghio joined in, saying, "the will of the people is there ... is here now," to appoint Groff.

But Laird, noting that councils in the past have not always appointed the next-highest finisher, also said that other potential candidates were not aware "we might make an appointment today." He cited the "dramatic difference" between fourth and fifth place in the council race of last November, but said of Groff's candidacy: "I would not rule out anything."

Groff said later that she had been in Las Vegas over the weekend when she found out that supporters wanted her to come forward and ask for the appointment. She also said she was not surprised the council majority did not support her nomination, but said she still plans to apply anyway.

Wormhoudt, describing an "emotionally wounding" week over the Reich controversy, said the process she recommended will set up a "period of healing. I don't think it's going to happen quickly. I don't think it's going to happen easily."

Former mayor and two-term councilman Bert Muhly, an early progressive, showed up at the council's evening session to remind the members — and the "media," he said — that it's just "politics" for the party in power to control appointments and the mayorship, to name another issue that upsets non-progressives. Muhly noted that he was a minority council member in his terms, from 1973 to 1981, but that he supported conservative Mahaney when he was appointed.