

1980

Santa Cruz Mayor Mahaney Can Look Back With Justifiable Pride

By **BILL NEUBAUER**
Sentinel Staff Writer

Still on top, still winning the big issues, Mayor John Mahaney is about to conclude on March 25 another phase of one of the most effective political careers in the modern history of Santa Cruz.

At the Santa Cruz City Council's evening session on March 25, Mahaney will preside over the election of a 1980-81 mayor and then turn over the gavel to his successor.

Analysis

Mahaney will remain on the City Council, for he was elected in 1979 to a four-year term that will expire in November 1983.

He fully expects to go on fighting for the principles he believes in, and he fully expects to go on struggling to avoid polarizations by working with others in mutual respect to arrive at agreements all can live with.

Mahaney has sought since his appointment to the City Council on Nov. 13, 1973, to reconcile political differences on the council.

He said the night he was installed: "I read in the paper about factions on both sides of the council. But each councilman and councilwoman I have met are all interested in the good of Santa Cruz. We may disagree among ourselves at one time or another, but we believe in the community.

That's why I'm here in Santa Cruz."

But almost from the moment he was seated, Mahaney became the storm center of controversy. Liberals who were then seeking to block construction of a convention center at Lighthouse Field were quick to say the council vacancy taken by Mahaney should have been filled through a special election.

Not too long afterward, Mahaney was denounced by the liberals when he voted with the so-called conservative bloc to defeat a proposal for a referendum election to determine if bonds for the convention center should be sold. That vote was the first of numerous 4-3 decisions to be swung one way or the other by Mahaney.

But although he was specially earmarked for defeat at the 1975 elections by the same liberal opponents, Mahaney romped to an easy win and an election to a four-year term of his own.

In 1979, although he opposed such popular, vote winning issues as Measure O, the so-called Greenbelt Initiative, Mahaney won again.

In both elections, Mahaney supported not only his own positions but the records of the City Councils he has served with.

He still says of each City Council, "This is the most responsive City Council in the history of the city."

Throughout his career in politics, there have been some who questioned the conciliatory, compromise approach Mahaney likes to use to get things done.

But the record says the approach has lasting value.

For example, as chairman of the city Parks and Recreation Commission in 1972, Mahaney played a vital role in formulating the city's neighborhood parks program and the master plan for park development.

All the lands targeted for purchase to convert into parks have been purchased, and most of the parks have been developed.

Mahaney's bitterest political foe, Sally DiGirolamo, who served on the City Council with him from 1973 to 1977, discovered that Mahaney's determination to provide parks was a force to respect. Mahaney helped her to get not one but two parks for Frederick Street. And throughout controversy over the acquisitions and developments, Mahaney hung tough and the parks came into existence.

Mahaney ran afoul of DiGirolamo's supporters in 1974 when he was chosen to be vice mayor by the conservative council faction, although DiGirolamo was in line for the post.

But after a smashing victory at the polls over the DiGirolamo forces' dedicated efforts to defeat him, Mahaney nominated DiGirolamo to be 1975-76 mayor and served as her vice mayor.

The council named Mahaney mayor for the 1976-77 term and



Dr. John Mahaney

as the Bicentennial Year mayor he supported the Town Clock project, dedicated it on July 4, saluted Robert Darrow and all the citizens who volunteered hundreds of hours of time to complete the project. He also got behind efforts to pay off the costs, and at this time the project is all but debt-free, according to Robert Shepherd, Santa Cruz finance director.

Mahaney's wife, Billie, incidentally, headed a committee to help make the city's Bicentennial celebration a success.

Next came the years of rent control proposals.

A little-remembered highlight of the celebration was the encasement of a Time Capsule in the Town Clock edifice, complete with a passbook for a \$25 savings account with County Bank of Santa Cruz. It was estimated that at the interest rates then prevailing, the account would be worth \$3,721.78 in the year 2076.

Big issues came along in the ensuing years: revision of the general plan, attempts to rewrite the City Charter, rent control elections, anti-speculation tax initiative election, the Greenbelt growth management initiative election.

Council members came and went. Within the years of

Mahaney's service on the council, for instance, there have been 13 different council members. Councilman Bert Muhly is the only council member who was on the council the night Mahaney was first appointed.

Then in 1979, Mahaney was again elected mayor, one of only three persons to serve two terms as mayor since the City Charter was adopted in 1948.

And, again, Mahaney was effective. The city general plan, long the target of writing and rewriting, was finally adopted to guide city development to the year 1990.

In the same mayoral year that is to end March 25, the City Council also adopted a growth management program mandated by passage of the Greenbelt Initiative in the same election that gave Mahaney his second full term in the council.

Mahaney is a physician and a partner in the Santa Cruz Medical Clinic, which is soon to move into new offices on Soquel Avenue. He claimed recently with a grin that he does have to earn a living for his family, and he denies with another grin that he has further political ambitions.

But there were efforts to get him to run for Third District Supervisor in the last supervisorial election, and there are some political workers already cranking up to persuade him to run "on an outstanding record" the next time the post is up for grabs.

Mahaney told The Sentinel recently that it is the total City Council that sets the policy for the city and that it is the total City Council, always, that should get credit for the good things that have happened to the city since he first began to serve it back in 1973.

But many supporters, and many oldtime opponents now agree that the city's 51st and 54th mayor since city incorporation in 1876 has a lot of accomplishments to look back on with justifiable pride.

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