

'Me, too' say candidates at City Council forum

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SANTA CRUZ — Eight is enough; nearly too much.

Seabright area residents discovered last night what it's like getting eight answers, or shadings of answers, to every question as they hosted the first forum for the eight candidates for City Council.

A couple of times, the candidate at the end of the line answered, "Me, too."

The forum was hosted by the Seabright Neighbors Association and brought out around 55 members and friends who gathered around tables at the Santa Cruz Yacht Club.

Considering that four of the challengers want to unseat two incumbents they refer to as "extremists," the political waters were barely rippled.

Four seats are up for election. The two incumbents running, Mayor Bruce Van Allen and Councilman Michael Rotkin, are two politicians who have gotten a lot of press for being socialists.

Also in the running are Jane Weed, a progressive-feminist who has a lot of neighborhood community involvement in health care, energy and toxic waste control. And, Ed Porter, a former City Council candidate who has been involved with Lighthouse Field issues.

The four moderate challengers are Katy Sears-Williams, Jim Felich, Arnold Levine and Wilson "Bill" Fieberling and they say the present council majority engages in "the politics of confrontation" and that a prime example is Measure A.

Measure A is an attempt to force the University of California to submit its plans for an electronics park through the city's planning process.

The measure directs the City Council to formally ask UCSC to comply and if it doesn't, to ask the state legislature to withhold building funds until it does.

The way the City Council handled this is an example of confrontation politics," Sears-Williams said.

Fieberling said, "I'm disappointed in the City Council's handling of this." He said that in the 20 years he was the city's public works director, "We never got to this kind of confrontation." He retired last July.

Rotkin said he doesn't think it's been done for confrontation; that the residents of Santa Cruz have a high stake in development of the park since they will have to pay the "\$4 to \$8 million in sewers and \$30 to \$50 million for a new Zayante Dam to provide the 3 to 9 percent of the city's water the new development will need."

Rotkin said those are UCSC's figures and he thinks it will use up to 18 percent.

All eight candidates said they didn't think the state would close UCSC if the high-tech park isn't built.

Porter said threats that UCSC would have to fold "are just scare tactics." He said that if the average citizen has to go through the planning process to build a garage, then certainly the university should have to go through the process to build a large high-tech park that would hire up to 2,000 people when built.

Weed said she would rather see the university seek other ways to make money and that the area should look at "a broader mix" of commerce to keep the campus going and the rest of the town in jobs.

All other candidates spoke of the need to bring in industry and business to provide jobs, but Rotkin warned that for every job created, there would be two people come here to fill it.

In creating new jobs and houses, Rotkin warned there are "300,000 people in Santa Clara Valley waiting to come here."

The incumbents were raked over some

barely warm embers for dropping the Rental, Information and Mediation Services in favor of a contract with the Legal Aid Society.

The moderates said the Legal Aid Society takes a harsher approach and is more apt to take legal action on behalf of tenants than to try to work things out around a bargaining table.

In opening remarks, Felich said, "One of the things I bring to the table is my problem-solving background."

Levine said he has "received a calling" to run from friends "who know of my ability to bring people together."

Sears-Williams says she will work to end "adversary approaches" and Fieberling says he wants things worked out cooperatively.

While it was clear the moderates are taking a heal-the-community approach, Porter has gotten the jump on them.

He is advocating a city planning process that begins in the neighborhood and stays there long enough for the problems to be worked out before "we all have to go down and fight City Hall."

He wants recognition for the neighborhood groups by City Hall.

Rotkin noted his political involvement began with the Westside Neighbors and Van Allen mentioned his began with grassroots efforts for rent control.

Asked about rent control, Rotkin said "It is a non-issue this campaign." It's been defeated three times at the ballot box in Santa Cruz. But, Rotkin, Van Allen and Weed acknowledged they have worked in support of rent control in past campaigns.

Van Allen and Rotkin say they are willing to have the Lighthouse Field plan reviewed again by the city to determine if West Cliff Drive should be moved back 300 feet at the Lighthouse Point.

A lot of people are protesting the relocation of the road, which is in the plans for developing Lighthouse Field into a state park. The plans are under review by the state parks commission.

Weed said she likes the re-design of the road and that after it was done, people would realize its impact was not too great.

Felich said he's already brought the issue to the City Council at a recent meeting.

Porter said he's been bringing it there for 10 years and was the first to speak out and was one of the first to speak out against the road realignment.

Rotkin said the council had until January to make new recommendations since it would be that long before the state commission would come back.

Fieberling corrected him, "You only have to November."