

## NEW LEADERSHIP

# Councilman Dodge picked as Watsonville mayor

✓ *Mayor's*  
Rios unanimously appointed as District 2 representative

By **DONNA JONES**

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WATSONVILLE — A new City Council passed over Mayor Pro Tem

Nancy Bilicich to select newly seated Councilman Daniel Dodge as the city's mayor Tuesday.

Bill Neighbors, who along with Dodge, Eduardo Montesino and former Mayor Oscar Rios was seated on the City Council on Tuesday, was the pick for mayor pro tem.

The council unanimously appointed Rios as the new District 2 represen-

tative before the selection of the new leaders.

Rios, who has served on the council for 15 of the past 21 years, replaces Luis Alejo, the newly elected assemblyman from the 28th District.

"I feel I can contribute by bringing my experience and also bring the voice of District 2 to the council," said Rios. "I am very concerned about our

unemployment, and our youth and the future they will have. We have a lot of possibilities if we work together, all of us, as a council."

Councilman Manuel Bersamin, who nominated Dodge, said a Corralitos pilot's involvement in a lawsuit over Luis Alejo's right to vote on his succes-



DODGE



RIOS

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## COUNCIL

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sor for the council showed the council is under attack and a strong leader was needed to defend its authority.

"I'm not taking anything away from Nancy Bilicich," said Bersamin, citing Dodge's long history of public service in the city.

Councilman Emilio Martinez supported Bilicich for the job. He reminded the council she had served well as mayor pro tem for the past year.

"Now we're going to tell her she doesn't have the experience," Martinez said. "Really, we are going to tell her that?"

Bitterness was in the air from the beginning of the meeting in the wake of the court battle over whether Alejo could vote for his successor. Martinez was one of three petitioners asking the court to overturn a 4-3 council decision to permit Alejo's participation. Monday, a judge ruled in favor of the city, refusing to stop the council-approved appointment process from moving forward.

Martinez acknowledged the judge didn't agree with him, but said he

thought going to the court for a ruling was a "healthy way to disagree."

"The court said 'No, Mr. Martinez,'" he said. "I said 'OK. Let's go forward.'"

But Antonio Rivas, stepping down after eight years on the council, wasn't ready to let it go and took a parting shot at Martinez for forcing the city to spend an estimated \$40,000 to defend the council's decision.

"He's a person who only cares about himself," Rivas said. "If he really cares about the city, ask him personally to reimburse the city the \$40,000 to \$45,000. That's money we could have used for something else in our community."