

Editorial

Silva, Francois the best Walnut Creek council candidates

Even Walnut Creek, the shopping and sales tax hub of Contra Costa, faces financial headwinds because of rising pension costs.

But the City Council, unlike many others, has made major changes since the Great Recession to temper the impact and prepare for what lies ahead.

The best council candidates to keep Walnut Creek on its path of fiscal responsibility, while continuing to provide the services residents have come

to expect, are incumbent Cindy Silva and Matt Francois, a land-use attorney and city planning commissioner.

Two seats are up this year on the five-member council. Of the five candidates, Silva and Francois are the most sophisticated about the city's budget. They best understand the legal and practical options that must be overcome to better control the city's pension obligations.

They are appropriately troubled by BART's recent power grab, using state legislation to take planning authority away from cities for land the transit agency owns within a half-mile of its stations. And they recognize that rent control will only exacerbate the region's housing woes.

Candidate Spencer Dress might be a fine councilman someday, but he needs more grounding, perhaps starting with serving on a city committee or commission. And Rebecca Byrd was factually confused in some of her answers.

Finally, there is the fifth candidate, Iman Novin, a member of the Planning Commission for four years now. He's well-versed on many city issues. But there are too many areas of concern.

First, there are questions of where his loyalties would lie. His strong support for BART's power grab is troubling, especially given that the transit agency is one of his professional clients.

Novin owns a real estate investment, development and property management firm in Walnut Creek that has already presented legal conflicts for him as a member of the Planning Commission and would

likely present the same problems for him on the City Council.

Then there's the issue of his residency, about which he was at first inappropriately indignant given the legitimate questions about his actions.

Novin has been registered to vote within the city limits since he's been on the Planning Commission. But he and his wife own a house in unincorporated Walnut Creek.

They have not claimed for county prop-

erty tax purposes that they live there. However, on a March application for a seat on the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission, he made a point of saying he lived there.

Novin now says he made a mistake, that he shouldn't have claimed to have lived outside the city limits. "I wanted to demonstrate that I'm aware of LAFCO issues," he said.

LAFCO's responsibilities include consideration of annexation of unincorporated areas.

It wasn't the first time he had used the address in unincorporated Walnut Creek on a county application. Late last year, he did so when he applied for seats on the county's Affordable Housing Finance Committee and the Council on Homelessness.

If he lives in the city, then misleading the county to try to gain a seat on LAFCO is inexcusable. The ends do not justify the means. And if he lives in unincorporated Walnut Creek, then he isn't eligible to serve on the Planning Commission or the City Council. Either way, this is troubling, and merits a full city investigation.

Meanwhile, our endorsement of Silva is made with recognition of hers and then-Councilman Bob Simmons' questionable meeting with the city attorney during a 2013 personnel investigation. We declined to endorse Simmons two years ago after he was evasive in his answers to questions about that meeting. In contrast, Silva has been forthcoming, and we are satisfied with her responses.

Silva and Francois are, by far, the best candidates in the Nov. 6 election.

Election 2018
