

Three vie for Ward 3 council seat

Allison White/The Times-Standard

Posted: 10/22/2010 01:20:36 AM PDT

Three candidates will be on the ballot this November for the Ward 3 seat on the Eureka City Council.

The city of Eureka and the city council have been through much this past year -- closing making cuts to public safety, enduring a state grab for \$1.8 million in redevelopment fun coming into city coffers. Current Ward 3 Councilman Jeff Leonard is termed out, leaving City Hall.



Ward 3 occupies central Eureka, roughly between C and N streets and Eighth and Harr

After the election, the new council will face, among other things, the passage or failure of two local measures. The city council put Measure N on the ballot at the request of the developer of the Balloon Track property, which lays at the foot of Waterfront Drive. It would change the property's zoning from mostly public to mixed use. The council also added Measure O to the Eureka ballot to temporarily increase the sales tax to 0.75 percent for five years to aid the city's shrinking budget.

A charter city, Eureka is run on a partial ward system -- candidates for a council seat must live within the ward they are running, and only face opposition from others in their ward. But the election is citywide, so residents vote for candidates in each ward.

Ron Kuhnel

Council candidate Ron Kuhnel said his ability to turn vision into action makes him the best candidate.

Kuhnel, 70, serves as chair of the Eureka Planning Commission, and previously worked 33 years for the state in a variety of roles. He said his background shows he is familiar with local governments and budgets, and he has seen firsthand the improvements needed in Eureka.

"My experience is absolutely aligned with the unmet needs of the city of Eureka," he said.

Cuts to public safety is the biggest issue facing the city, Kuhnel said, and he hopes to restore funding to that core service. Another of Kuhnel's goals is to encourage economic growth by welcoming businesses into Eureka's industrial parks to provide living-wage jobs. He said he would also like see more brownfield cleanups.

To help address some residential problems, Kuhnel said he would like to see neighborhood groups supported. With more active neighbors, such as the group that rallied for action at a former B Street school, individual neighborhood needs can be addressed and residents can take a greater leadership role in the areas where they live.

"We need our neighborhoods to become empowered by city government," he said.

Kuhnel said he would like to see the council go through a zero-based budgeting process next year that assumes nothing and has every program justify itself and its needs. Although the city "went through the motions" of doing this in June, it really didn't, he said. Measure O would bring in more revenue, but Kuhnel said voters likely won't pass it.

Kuhnel said he has no position on Measure N, but thinks the measure was unnecessary. If it fails, the results would not preclude rezoning the property through the regular process. The council has done all it can regarding the Balloon Track property zoning, and he would prefer the zoning be considered after litigation is resolved.

Xandra Manns

From working 30 years as a planner, Xandra Manns said she has an insider's view on how to get things done in city government instead of "reinventing the wheel."

”When you’re a planner, you write the recommendations,” she said. “Basically, you do the research for the planning commission and the council.”

A number of issues are facing the city that 70-year-old Manns would like to see addressed. The city needs to determine a strategy to take care of the homeless, and address traffic control and air pollution, she said. Other issues needing attention are cell phone tower regulations, taking care of local resources and making the area more self-sufficient. Jobs could be created through the formation of business incubators to encourage start-ups, she said.

On the budget, Manns suggests the council determine what are essential services, and what other items can change. The use of volunteers could cut costs on some services, and the city is not yet taking full advantage of those community assets. Furloughs and early retirements could also help keep the budget in the black, she said.

There are no obvious cuts that need to be made, although fewer staff could be sent to committee meetings, Manns said. She said she would look to the finance department for guidance on future cuts.

To her, the city’s core services include public safety, garbage, planning, building, engineering, public works, water and wastewater, parks, recreation, street maintenance and landscaping and tree maintenance.

Potential revenue sources could include selling alleys to adjacent properties to create dog runs or for other uses.

Manns said she is unsure of Measure N’s purpose, but she hopes to see the council take a more direct approach to development near the bay and create a plan.

”It could really make or break Eureka in the future,” she said.

Mike Newman

As an experienced small business-owner and long-time resident, Mike Newman said he is the best candidate to promote industry and job growth in Eureka.

”I am a concerned citizen of this community and have been for the last 27 years,” he said.

Newman, 52, sees two main issues in the city needing attention: the hiring of key personnel and balancing the budget. Come January, the city will be without a finance director, a city attorney and a city manager, if new people are not hired soon. A lack of such institutional knowledge will “take its toll” if not addressed promptly, he said.

Newman said he would also like to facilitate the cleanup of brownfields near the bay and put the sites back into production.

To balance the budget, Newman said he would prefer to increase revenue by attracting businesses with living-wage jobs instead of raising taxes. He would also like to see more variety and pricing in retail and service businesses to keep money from “bleeding” to other areas. A good start would be to clean up the Balloon Track property and get the Marina Center project on task, he said.

Eureka’s core services to consider in the budget are public safety, water and wastewater services and street maintenance, he said. Newman was uncertain where more reductions would come from, as cuts have already gone deep. Deferred maintenance has also caused its own problems as a money saving tactic, with roads out of repair and equipment breaking down. The city may also have to “pay the piper” later if something breaks completely.

Although involved in litigation, having the zoning of the Balloon Track property changed through Measure N could be a step in the right direction, he said. Much of the public seems to want that development and cleanup to happen as soon as possible, even though some small groups have been able to halt the process, he said.

NAME: Ron Kuhnel

AGE: 70

EXPERIENCE: Spent 33 years working for the state of California, ending as a chief information officer for the state; five years as chief of technology for the Department of Insurance; six years as vice president of regulatory affairs for Insweb Insurance; six years as an independent consultant, eight years on the Eureka Planning Commission, member of various other local commissions

EDUCATION: Master's degree in computer information systems from California State University Sacramento, currently completing a master's degree in sociology from Humboldt State University

KEY ENDORSEMENTS: Eureka Police Officers Association, Central Labor Council of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, Firefighters Local 652, Humboldt County Democratic Central Committee, Peter and Nancy LaVallee, Leslie Lollich, Bob and Pam Service, Andrew Bird, Zuretti and Brenda Goosby, Michael Winkler

WEBSITE: kuhnel.com

NAME: Xandra Manns

AGE: 67

EXPERIENCE: Spent 25 years in city planning in the Bay Area, five years as a planner in a planning consulting firm, five years as a teacher in Yuba City and Washington, D.C., Keep Eureka Beautiful member

EDUCATION: Master's degree in city planning/civil engineering from Stanford, bachelor's degree in elementary education from George Washington University

KEY ENDORSEMENTS: No official list

compiled

WEBSITE: xandramanns.com

NAME: Mike Newman

AGE: 52

EXPERIENCE: Eight years as an insurance agent at Shaw and Peterson Insurance, 15 years owning insurance agency in Henderson Center, 10 years in retail

EDUCATION: High school graduate, some classes through Santa Rosa Junior College

KEY ENDORSEMENTS: Virginia Bass, Chris Crawford, Mike Downey, Michael Giacone, Lance Madsen, Richard Marks, Dave Parris, Gary Philp, Liana Simpson, Steve Strombeck

WEBSITE: newman4council.com

Allison White can be reached at 441-0506 or awhite@times-standard.com.