



Chu



Swegles



Lee



Risch

City council

The top candidates in Sunnyvale race

Sunnyvale's sharply divided city council will see a shift in power with this election, as three of the four-member majority are term-limited out of office. Among likely results are fewer budget cuts for public safety, whose union is active in this campaign, and close stewardship of the Forum Group's plan for a new downtown.

In three of the four races — all of which are voted on citywide — the choice should be easy. Dean Chu, Ron Swegles and Otto Lee are thoughtful and well-prepared candidates who have volunteered with community groups and served as planning commissioners.

The other race, for seat 7, is more difficult. Incumbent Tim Risch is challenged by Friends of Sunnyvale founder Melinda Hamilton. We recommend Risch, but not without reservations.

Risch's strengths are his experience in government and record of fiscal restraint. He lost support over his vote for the current budget, which included public safety cuts recommended by the chief but opposed by the union. Next year Risch will be a minority voice, but since deeper spending cuts will be needed, it's a voice that should be heard.

Unfortunately, Risch's shoot-from-the-hip style has alienated even some friends. He showed terrible judgment in the recent clash with the police over an incident at a nightclub — not because he asked questions but because of the way he did it. To be effective in a second term, he'll need to change his tone.

Hamilton came out of nowhere to lead the grass-roots Friends of Sunnyvale and fight proposed plans for the downtown. While the Friends' original ideas were impractical, the group helped to ensure that the street grid will be restored through the Town Cen-

ter mall and that storefronts will have the look of a real town, not a shopping center — good things.

Hamilton now says she supports the plan. But after it was adopted, Friends continued to push ballot measures that would have crippled it, even filing a lawsuit when their signature drive fell short. That combative history and a lack of public experience in any but this one issue make Hamilton a risky choice.

If she stays engaged in civic life — ideally joining the planning commission — she could be a good candidate in two years. For now, Risch's experience makes him the safer bet.

In seat 4, Dean Chu is outstanding. His expertise as a financial analyst will come in handy sorting out Sunnyvale's impenetrable budget, and his planning experience will make him a force in shaping the downtown design. His opponent, Pete Mate Richards, is an amiable businessman but lacks Chu's qualifications.

Seat 5 is more closely contested, but Otto Lee is clearly the more qualified. He's a strong advocate for a walkable and welcoming downtown and for underground parking instead of ugly garages. His opponent, James Fussell, has good ideas but little civic or volunteer experience. Like Hamilton, he'd be a great candidate for a planning commission appointment.

In Seat 6, Ron Swegles is the stand-out. An administrator for a senior community, he'll bring an important perspective to the council. His opponent, Mike Flores, lacks experience and holds positions that are out of the mainstream. For instance, he opposes rebuilding a downtown.

Sunnyvale needs a council that can hit the ground running on complex budget and planning issues. Chu, Lee, Swegles and Risch are the best choices.