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Emeryville to elect two council members Tuesday

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Cassie Harwood Oakland Tribune

Changes are ahead for Emeryville, which will elect two fresh faces to its City Council on Tuesday, helping to shepherd in a new era for a city that is seeking a balance between future growth and development and its residents' needs for improved services, recreation and cultural amenities.

All three candidates — Kurt Brinkman, Frank Flores and Jennifer West — are newcomers vying to replace incumbents Mayor Dick Kassis and Councilman John Fricke, who have declined to run for re-election.

"This is the first time in quite a while that none of the incumbents on the council elected to run again for office," City Clerk Karen Hemphill said.

Fricke, who served just one four-year term on the council, announced in July that he would not run in this election, but Kassis' decision came unexpectedly. Kassis served one term in 1976, and has remained on the council since being reappointed in 1992.






Kassis, who retired as chief trial attorney for AC Transit in July, said he is interested in returning in the future, but needed a break. "I'm very committed to Emeryville and I'm going to miss being involved," he said. "I just felt, in conjunction with retiring from my job of 36 years, it was time to take a little time for myself."

Fricke has been a vociferous proponent of bicycle and pedestrian access in Emeryville, and while he successfully pushed such proposals as the installation of a bike lane on Adeline Street, not all of his bids have been embraced by the council. "During my four years on City Council, my accomplishments have fallen short of what I set out to do," he said in an e-mail. "While there are a number of projects in various stages of completion, one is judged by what is completed on one's watch."

Fricke has endorsed West, a substitute teacher for the Emery Unified School District. West said that though she shares much of Fricke's vision for the city — such as increasing parks and open space, bringing in more local, rather than regional businesses and increasing access for bicyclists and pedestrians — she hopes to take a more facilitative approach to issues.

Though West is a political newcomer, she says her teaching experience reveals her commitment to public service. "I'm not a city hall insider, if you will," she said. "I'm truly running as a concerned resident. I see serving the City Council as another way of contributing to my community — as a way to really make improvements and help the residents have a voice."

Candidate Kurt Brinkman, who has been endorsed by all council members

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except Fricke, is also running with a strong background in education. He has been a trustee on the Emery Unified School Board for the past six years and co-leads Emeryville's City School Committee.

Brinkman's objective is to improve and maintain the working relationship between the school board and the City Council, and he said improving programs and facilities at the city's schools — such as the recent remodel of Anna Yates Elementary — is crucial in bringing Emeryville children into the district. According to a district public information officer, only 68 percent of students enrolled at both the elementary and secondary school levels are either Emeryville residents or children of parents who work in the city.

Brinkman also supports Emeryville's Center for Community Life, an approximately \$125 million project proposed at the site of Emeryville's Secondary School that would house grades K-12 and serve as a community and recreation center, which the city lacks.

"I felt there needed to be a champion of that on the council, and I wanted to be that champion," Brinkman said.

Flores — whose middle name is Emery and who descends from Emeryville's founder, Joseph Stickney Emery — has also been endorsed by Kassis, as well as Councilwoman Nora Davis. Flores is vice chairman of the city's Planning Commission, which advises the council on zoning and development. He has served on the city's Housing Committee since 2003.

Like his opponents, Flores wants to improve programs and enrollment at Emeryville schools — a process he said will be helped by increasing family housing in the city. He also supports making the city more accessible for residents, both by fostering locally serving businesses and making transportation easier for bicyclists and pedestrians.

"I wouldn't say the city has been avoiding doing these things," Flores said. "It has just been a matter of redeveloping a city that was primarily industrial use, with a smattering of houses, into what's now a center for retail stores and housing. I want to continue with what we're doing, which is connecting the city."

There is also a school board race in Emeryville on Nov. 3, with three trustee seats up for grabs. Incumbents Cheryl Webb, Miguel Dwin and Joshua Simon are running for re-election. They will be challenged by Brian Donahue, a homebuilder, and Darice Bridges, a student.

Emeryville voters will also decide whether to raise the tax rate on the city's card room — The Oaks — from 9 percent to 10 percent of gross sales to help pay for city services. Measure K is supported by the council and has no opposition.

Cecily Burt contributed to this story.

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