WATSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Campaign starts for 2014 race

Former Cabrillo trustee Garcia to challenge incumbent Dodge

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WATSONVILLE — The next Watsonville City Council election is more than 11 months away, but the battle is on for the District 5 seat held by Daniel Dodge.

If the opening salvos are any indication, expect a heated campaign.

Announcing her intention to challenge Dodge at Tuesday’s council meeting, city Parks and Recreation Commission chair Rebecca Garcia criticized Dodge as one who doesn’t communicate or collaborate well, is undiplomatic and disrespectful of the political efforts of others.

“There’s a lot of negativity about the City Council right now,” Garcia said Wednesday. “Unfortunately, Daniel is one who is contributing to that negativity.”

Along with Dodge, terms also are up for District 4 Councilman Eduardo Montesino, District 3 Councilman Lowell Hurst and District 7 Councilwoman Nancy Bilicich.

In 2012, four seats went uncontested. That Dodge faces a challenge is at least in part due to his spearheading of Measure T, an initiative to annex 95 acres of farmland for a shopping center. The measure lost in a landslide in a special election June 4.

Garcia said the election cost taxpayers more than $60,000, and the campaign prevented any negotiation with opponents.

“Daniel does not practice diplomacy,” she said. “I will be a City Council member that negotiates and is willing to compromise with those that may oppose my position.”

Garcia, who stepped down from the Cabrillo College board of trustees in 2012 after serving for 20 years, said two other issues prompted her to run. Though Dodge appointed her to chair a task force charged with council redistricting after the 2010 census, she surprised her by bringing his own map to the council to compete with her group’s recommendations. More recently, he agreed with a campaign finance complaint brought against backers of a petition drive aimed at changing city governance.

Dodge, she said, is more concerned with his own welfare than that of the residents of the district and city he represents.

Garcia, 66, said her decision to run against a former friend and political ally wasn’t easy.

“After research and reflection, I decided I could do a better job,” she said.

Dodge, who previously announced he would seek re-election, said he’d run on a record that includes successfully advocating for regional transportation funds that are helping rebuild Airport Boulevard and will create more walking and biking trails in the city, pushing for flood protection along the Pajaro River and Salsipuedes Creek and working on juvenile justice issues.

“I’ve advocated not only for my district and Watsonville, but for all of the Pajaro Valley,” he said. “I have a proven record.”

As to the charge of not being able to collaborate, he pointed to his service on county-wide commissions and boards. He noted he is chair of the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission and the Santa Cruz Metro board, leadership posts he won through election by his peers.

Dodge, 57, also stands by his decision to champion Measure T, an initiative, he said, that had significant support in the community despite its loss.

“As a councilman, I was elected to do things for economic development, not to talk about them. I did, and I wasn’t successful so I’ll try something else,” Dodge said.

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