

Guest Column: The city election that never was

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Crescent City has finally hit ground zero on candidate recruitment. Perhaps the public is so enamored things are finally getting done, no one dares to challenge the incumbents. Therefore, per city ordinance, no challenge to incumbents means there will be no city council election, next month. Disturbing.

I see it differently.

Community apathy abounds. No new blood, no fresh ideas, no energy and many would concur, scant hope for a robust city. New proposals suggesting a different direction from an engaged public is vital.

The maneuvering played among incumbent candidate/council members is disheartening and most certainly self-serving. Since all candidates for council are at-large, the three incumbents filed for the openings. Two vacancies are four-year terms, the third is a two year residual term.

Former long-term mayor and multi-Rikunzentakata, Japan Sister City traveler, Blake Inscore waited for his fellow councilors to file papers for the four year slots, leaving Inscore with the a two-year term. I feel confident in reporting this exercise was not just coincidental. The creation of the residual term came about

following duly-elected Mayor Pro Tem Alex Campbell's sudden resignation after Campbell took his oath in December 2020. Selective and partisan district attorney prosecution and conviction of Campbell forced the resignation on questionable residency requirements and created the two year term.

Unelected/Council-selected Ray Altman was appointed to replace Campbell. Altman should be running for the balance of the Campbell seat. He came in fourth in the 2020 city election. Councilor Altman remains a never-elected member of the Crescent City Council. Instead, he will be rewarded with a full four years, with no competition, slam dunk. Very Troubling.

Councilor/Mayor Pro Tem Isaiah Wright need not campaign; he will also be compensated with a fresh four-year term. Again, no contesting, no debate, no vying for your precious vote and no public engagement on vital city issues. Boring.

Incumbent councilors who are not challenged to respond to voter scrutiny have no incentive to follow community sentiment or even their oath of office. The absence of new city council candidates is a punch to the abdomen of democracy.

Angela and I are city voters. We are none-too-pleased with the limited roster of banal candidates, all incumbents. The community would have appreciated seeing a choice of candidates. We would have welcomed some good ol' fashion campaigning. Not going to happen this year.

Credit given where deserved. Potholes and street maintenance issues are finally being addressed. If Measure S funds are the reason for the sudden renaissance, I can only humbly admit, my opposition to the landslide passage may have been premature and my misjudgment. Mea Culpa. The jury is still out but maybe there is indeed some hope in transforming Crescent City into a precious little gem.

Instead of labeling Crescent City, the Comeback Town, maybe the council should rename Crescent City, the Little Jewel on the Pacific.

Still, sans any new challengers for council seats is depressing. The conclusion has already been determined. There will be zero change on this council for the next two years. City dwellers should give serious thought to running in '24, if for no other reason but to keep the incumbents answerable to voters.

Community Concerns remain:

- 1) The heavy emphasis on near-hysterical COVID protocols and an intended city mandate to have all its employees tested was severe over-reach.
- 2) Floating yet another City sales tax increase, this one a 13 percent spike from 7.25 to 8.25 percent was and remains punitive to poor and fixed income folks. Has anyone on the council thought about installing parking meters as a source of revenue on city streets? Simple arithmetic: more of us will shop, buy gas/diesel in Brookings because of the spike in sales taxes.
- 3) Community indifference to what can and should be done to address the growing drug abuse, alcoholic and mental illness problem destroying our city remains the single greatest impact issue in Crescent City. Folks

move here with nothing in their pockets but problems is not how to build a prosperous, beautiful little Jewel on the Pacific.

Again, to be fair, City Manager Eric Wier and the council has been awarded two significant grants: one to complete the Front Street road project and the other, a \$3 million jackpot for an amphitheater in Beach Front Park. I commend the city in its successful negotiation of this highly competitive grant bidding process. There exists justifiable concern the city will be able to maintain the pristine site from human occupancy and the associated destruction by an irresponsible vagrant population heretofore mentioned.

Will the city ever address its Ordinance requiring property owners to abate unsightly, overgrown weeds from sidewalks, curbs and four feet into the street? Concern has been duly expressed to the council on this item many times. So much of our city is unkept and lacks pride in community.

Crescent City has much to improve upon.

The city needs a code enforcement officer. A part-time position attached to the police department should be created. An idea worth discussing is contracting with county code enforcement, which recently hired a second code enforcement officer. Would it be prudent for the city to request the county make hours available for city code Enforcement? Failure to effectively and expeditiously address city code violations should suggest the city should consider scraping its ignored code.

At some point, the council must realize there is more to the city than Beach Front Park and Front Street. Apparently, citizens will just have to wait and trust in this predictably bland council. Please nudge me from my nap when and if that happens.

Roger Gitlin is a city resident and retired two-term Del Norte County Supervisor