



The Carmel Pine Cone

Mayoral, council candidates explain why voters should choose them

By MARY SCHLEY

AMID WILDFIRES and a pandemic, the top priorities of those running for mayor and two city council seats are pretty clear, focusing on public safety and economic recovery, and while the incumbents argue their experience makes them better choices, candidates seeking their first terms point to their public participation in town and their fresh perspectives.

■ Mayor Dave Potter

Potter, who served on the planning commission and city council in Monterey before becoming a Monterey County supervisor, and who sat on the powerful California Coastal Commission for a dozen years, said the city's 2,500-plus voters should favor him for his experience and his desire to keep working for the benefit of the community.

"Experience counts," he said. "Now is not a time to learn how to govern."

Potter, who lives just around the corner from city hall with wife Janine Chicourrat, said his top priority is figuring out "how to get this community through these tough times" — a challenge that's further inspiring his run for reelection.

"How are we going to keep the community economically alive while still preserving resources?" he asked.

Potter also noted that reaching people is a bit more difficult during the time of Covid, when all meetings are held electronically and don't garner anywhere near the typical level of public participation, so he's been making an extra effort to get out and talk to people and hear their concerns.

"People are very appreciative of our outreach," he said, and because he's low-key about his office, many of those conversations are quite candid.

■ Judy Refuerzo, mayoral challenger

Refuerzo, who is hoping to unseat Potter, has never run for political office here but has served on the community activities commission for seven years and frequently speaks at public meetings. She said people should vote for her because she “will devote myself full-time to the city’s residents.”

“I care deeply for our little village in the forest by the sea and have been involved in the city since moving here,” she said, including serving as secretary of the Carmel Residents Association board. “I show up at city council meetings; I challenge the city government when they don’t follow protocols.”

Refuerzo, who teaches yoga, said she has “no business obligations or conflicts of interest that would prevent me from fully serving the residents, showing up at city events and having an open-door policy to the community and city staff.”

Her top priority is protecting the residents by supporting public safety, especially in light of the pandemic, she said, noting the recent burglary of Carmel Drug and the violent attack on a woman at her vacation home just off Scenic in early May.

“Public safety covers a lot of issues: Covid and the city’s enforcement, or lack thereof, of county rules,” she said, as well as emergency response times, notification to residents, and the responsiveness of city departments when it comes to removing trees that elevate the risk of wildfire. She also focused on safety on the streets, with so many parking areas being used for dining, and sidewalk maintenance.

■ Councilman Bobby Richards

Richards grew up in Pacific Grove and has called Carmel home for years, worked with prominent property owner and hotelier Denny LeVett, and is now running the restaurant at Monterey Airport with restaurateur Rich Pepe. He was elected to the council in 2016 after serving on the community activities commission. Since Potter was elected two years ago, Richards has been vice mayor.

Like Potter, he pointed to his experience as a strong argument for his reelection.

“I bring to the table a proven track record of being fair, understanding, pragmatic and fiscally responsible,” he said. “My values have always guided my decisions, and my ethics have been fully displayed.”

He said the city faces difficult times, and the community doesn’t “need any more surprises or challenges.”

Richards’ top priority is the city’s fiscal health, given the precipitous drop in tax revenues resulting from the coronavirus shutdown, but he focused much of his dis-

ussion on outdoor dining. Permits for restaurants serving people outside on the sidewalk and in parking spaces are set to expire at the end of the year, and he said he cares deeply about what happens next.

“I cannot think of anything that has the potential to change the character of our town more than this,” he said. “It is a complicated subject that will require participation from the restaurateurs, planning commission, water board, ABC, chamber of commerce, fire and safety, and most importantly, the residents.”

Richards speculated many restaurants would have gone out of business had they not been able to serve patrons outside. “This would be devastating not only to the industry and employees, but also to our village,” he said.

But any move to make the parklets permanent will require much consideration, he said, including impacts on the village character, retail businesses and parking.

■ Mo Massoudi, council challenger

Massoudi, who runs a plant genomics company in Monterey and owned Café Carmel on Ocean Avenue for nearly a dozen years, has not run for office here before but served on the forest and beach commission. He touted his independent thinking and fairness as reasons voters should support him.

“People should vote for me because I am an independent voice and I will bring unbiased opinion to the council,” he said. “I strongly believe there should be a detachment and disconnect between the city council and their potential strong ties with businesses in town.”

The current council, he argued, is “out of balance,” because too many members have “strong business connections.”

“As noted in the 1929 city ordinance, the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea is to be primarily a residential city, and the businesses should come second to support the residents,” he said.

Massoudi allowed that small businesses are critical for the city’s economic livelihood but said residents should come first.

Considering the state of the economy, the pandemic and the recent fires, Massoudi said the list of top priorities is growing, but he wanted to focus on public safety and the removal of dead plants and trees that could fuel a wildfire here — though last week, he argued at the forest and beach commission against cutting down a large stand of famously combustible eucalyptus trees. “It is extremely unfortunate to see what has happened to our fellow Californians due to ravaging wildfires,” he said. “Climate change is a fact and at this point is undeniable.”

Massoudi said he’d also like security cameras installed in the business district. “With people dining on the street and having visitors from around the world, I think people are now vulnerable more than ever to potential acts of terrorism,” he said. “We want to make sure we eliminate another Boston Marathon and other acts that may put our residents and visitors in harm’s way.”

■ Karen Ferlito, council challenger

Ferlito, who has lived in Carmel since the late 1980s and was on the forest and beach commission for several terms totaling 16 years, said voters should choose her “because I have the leadership skills gained from serving our city for more than 30 years.” A board member of the Friends of Carmel Forest and the Friends of Mission Trail Nature Preserve, Ferlito is a regular at public meetings and said that experience helps her “know the financial challenges facing our city at this unprecedented time.”

She has also worked in retail at the Carmel Bay Co. for a dozen years, and has served on the boards of organizations outside the city, so she understands “how important it is for Carmel to coordinate with the other cities on the Monterey Peninsula.”

■ Graeme Robertson, council challenger

Robertson, who moved to Carmel with his family from Scotland when he was 8, has also never run for office and has not served on another city board or commission, but has long been involved in the community. He has served on the boards of the Carmel Public Library Foundation, the youth center, the MEarth habitat project, the chamber of commerce (board chairman), Carmel-by-the-Sea Rotary (past president), Carmel High School Foundation and Church in the Forest (board chairman).

“In the five-and-a-half decades that my family has lived in Carmel-by-the-Sea, I have developed a deep appreciation for what makes our village special by working to maintain its unique character and beauty, and to ensure that its economy flourishes,” he said. “I have the collaborative, consistent and respectful leadership skills that are critical for serving our people on the city council.”

Robertson said he’s known “as someone who listens to and studies all points of view, and acts only after giving issues my undivided attention.”

His top priority is “to protect the character of Carmel-by-the-Sea and plan for the future during the post-Covid reopening of our beloved village.”

“There are thousands of people that have helped create the character of Carmel-by-the-Sea over the last 104 years. Their vision, foresight and hard work enable residents and visitors to enjoy a quality of life and experience that is unparalleled,” he said. “Protecting that in both the short term and long term, in the uncertain world we currently live in, will require a balanced, collaborative and thoughtful approach. Including all the stakeholders in these discussions will be essential.”

The biggest challenge facing the community, and therefore the top priority, will be “emerging from this pandemic successfully.”

“I support working together as a city council and including representatives from our entire community to initiate a necessary and vital new planning process that will work to address the challenges we face and to explore new opportunities for our village in order to not only survive, but to thrive,” she said. “We have incredibly talented and creative residents and business leaders in our community, and by tapping into this expertise, we will create a more resilient economy and a vibrant and more sustainable city that will be better prepared to meet future challenges, as well.”