

A quick sexual grope of a young woman in a Palo Alto high school parking lot 22 years ago. Nine years later, a quiet agreement to leave his job as a school teacher.

With less than a month to go before the election, Mountain View City Council candidate Tom Frankum is confronting his past.

The revelations are adding to an already controversial city council race, with the candidacy of the ousted mayor's wife and one of her endorsements being questioned.

And while some are defending Frankum, a former environmental planning commissioner who has publicly acknowledged the incident, other candidates and officials interviewed this week said they are "heartbroken" to hear of it.

Frankum, 61, admits that in 1980, while a full-time teacher at Gunn High School in Palo Alto, he fondled an 18-year-old woman who had graduated. Six years later, the woman brought the incident to the attention of Gunn officials. In 1989, Frankum agreed to resign his teaching position and have his teaching credential revoked, although he says his resignation had nothing to do with the incident. He left, he said, because he had lined up another job as an independent contractor in residential remodeling.

Mia Bossie, now 40 and living near Santa Cruz, said she decided to go public with her experience when she saw that Frankum was running for a government position while emphasizing his integrity and rich experiences with local youth.

"I didn't report this to get back at him," Bossie said.

Frankum, who taught at Gunn from 1971 to 1989, said the incident should be seen as a past indiscretion.

"What's the sentence for a 10-second fondle? Is it more than 22 years? Is it life?" said the former planning commissioner. "I want people to focus on the tens of thousands of good things I've done in my life, not to focus on one event."

The basic facts of that event are not contested. But Frankum and Bossie vehemently disagree about their context. And the context is the difference between an illegal sexual molestation and an inappropriate act on school grounds.

Bossie described the incident as completely unwanted and shocking. She said that immediately after he groped her, she left and never spoke to Frankum again.

She said she decided to go public after "I see this sign about 'Integrity' and all this stuff about his years of experience as a teacher and that he is on board on two youth groups that deal with alcohol and abuse problems."

Frankum has admitted he touched Bossie, but suggested that the act may have been consensual.

"She was being very provocative and I fell for that," he said.

As for Frankum's departure from Gunn, Bossie said that came after she went to school officials several years after the incident. She said a lawyer for the district interviewed her. In November 1989, Gunn High reached an agreement with Frankum to leave his teaching position, according to school records. The school paid him

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In an interview this week, Frankum first said, "The settlement was not connected to this episode at all." And then, later, he said it was.

School district officials would not comment on the agreement, calling it a private personnel matter.

Now candidates and city officials are abuzz about the Frankum matter.

"This is an issue of general honesty and character," said Gregory Perry, a council candidate. "If that was his record as a teacher, then that is certainly not the image he was conveying with his political message."

City Councilwoman Rosemary Stasek, an incumbent who is not up for re-election this year, said she was "heartbroken" over the news about Frankum. But she, like many others interviewed, wasn't certain how it would play as a campaign issue.

"He suffered the consequences for this action," she said. "Now each voter needs to look at this and decide if there has been enough time and consequences accrued to this."

Contact Sean Webby at swebby@sjmercury.com or (650) 688-7577. Fax (650) 688-7555.