

Challengers citing issues of growth (11/02/2000)		
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But other Mountain View residents say challenger Matt Pear, a member of the city environmental planning commission, has enough qualifications to give him a shot at knocking off an incumbent -- if he works hard enough.

The incumbents -- Stasek, Mario Ambra, Nancy Noe and Mary Lou Zoglin -- emerged as the top vote-getters in 1996. They led a field of 10 candidates vying for three seats opened up by term limits and a fourth vacated by an incumbent who declined to seek re-election.

Unlike in 1996, when the city electorate was up in arms over the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's proposal to open Moffett Federal Airfield to air cargo, this year Mountain View doesn't appear to have any unique local issues to fire up the voters.

That presents a problem for challengers Pear and Greg Perry, as does the fact that there are no open seats this year. Dumping an incumbent, in the absence of scandal or intense voter dissatisfaction, is never easy.

But both Pear and Perry hope to convince voters that they can do a better job than the incumbents in managing a city where two out of three residents are renters -- a huge number of them well-educated and prosperous. Although neither one says he is running against any one incumbent, both say a lack of good planning has made Mountain View's interrelated housing and traffic problems worse than they need to be.

They cite statistics from the Association of Bay Area Governments that say between April 1995 and April 2000, 14,140 new jobs were created in Mountain View, while only 1,240 new housing units were occupied. Partly as a result of the housing-jobs imbalance, landlords of 40-year-old, minimally maintained apartments are frequently asking \$2,000 a month for rent. City officials are concerned because fewer and fewer waiters, laborers, teachers, cops and firefighters can afford to live in the city.

Traffic, already at a crawl on the roads feeding highways 85 and 237 and U.S. 101, will potentially worsen if NASA succeeds with plans for redeveloping 2,000 acres of prime Silicon Valley real estate at Ames Research Park/Moffett Federal Airfield.

On the horizon, city officials see a looming budget deficit hitting if the economy stalls. Already, sales tax receipts, which make up about one-third of the city's revenue, are plunging as more companies do non-taxable online business with other companies. The tax situation will worsen when Sun Microsystems, like other

explosively growing companies before it, moves out of tight headquarters in Mountain View to a more spacious locale in Santa Clara.

But the incumbents say there's no reason for voters to boot them out of office, saying they have responded appropriately and with foresight on each of the problems.

Only in the past couple of years have real estate and housing prices flared into a crisis. The council responded by working with the Midpeninsula Housing Coalition to save hundreds of subsidized apartment units from going on the open market and by forcing developers to pay into a housing fund or build 10 percent of approved projects at "affordable" prices.

The city is in the midst of approving more than 100 efficiency studio apartments and is considering instituting housing impact fees on developers.

Council members and challengers alike promise to lobby NASA to require its higher-education partners to build a significant number of housing units for students, faculty and researchers as the space agency proceeds with its plans for massive redevelopment at Ames that could bring as many as 15,000 people to the 2,000-acre site each day.

"They better build some housing or they're going to hear it not only from me but from everybody," Stasek vowed. "Token housing for some visiting faculty is not going to be sufficient."

Council members also say they have tried hard to steer commercial and high-density housing development to places where it's easy to catch public transit. Mountain View, they said, has done its job over the years, successfully fighting to bring light rail in, and building a transit center downtown where buses, light rail and Caltrain intersect.

Several said it's time for business to step up and help out with the housing and traffic problems.

Council members also say they have been careful with the city treasury, especially since sales tax receipts have begun to plunge. The city is building its reserves and has avoided starting new, ongoing programs that would have to be cut if bad times hit. They are also about to begin marketing some city-owned land to lease for a major five-star hotel development in the North Bayshore area that they say should be a major new source of revenue.

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