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Editorial: San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan deserves full four-year term

For City Council, elect Joe Lopez, David Cohen, Michael Mulcahy, Sukhdev Singh Baniwal and Arjun Batra



(Josie Lepe for Bay Area News Group)

Mayor Matt Mahan has sought common ground with the labor-dominated council and found ways to collaborate in the best interests of city residents.



By **MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL** | Mercury News

UPDATED: February 9, 2024 at 2:01 p.m.



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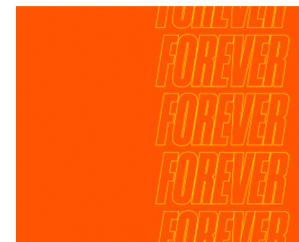
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San Jose is recovering from the pandemic better than many other urban areas. Nevertheless, the city's population has declined, office vacancies are up, and thousands of homeless people continue to struggle on the streets.

Before COVID, plans for San Jose's future focused on commercial office growth in an effort to tap into Silicon Valley's economic engine. But times have changed. Old priorities are taking on new urgency. It's still about growth, but there's more emphasis on housing to make the city more affordable for workers, populate downtown to bolster the city's economy and shelter the unhoused.

San Jose needs leaders who see the city's future promise and understand its challenges. In a time of rising needs and dwindling resources, the moment demands a careful,

SAN JOSE CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

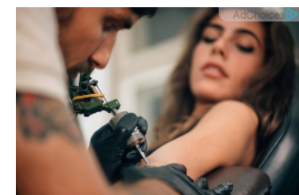


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thoughtful approach from city leaders. In the March 5 election, San Jose voters will have a chance to pick those leaders, including the mayor and five of the 10 city councilmembers. Here are our recommendations.



fantastic and cannot wait to call back. Thanks for everything and see you soon. cheers - this is Enrique testing"

Mayor – Mahan

If it feels as if San Jose residents just voted for mayor, that's because they did just 15 months ago. In 2022, the race went to a November runoff in which then-City Councilman Matt Mahan narrowly defeated labor-stalwart Cindy Chavez, a member of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. That same year, voters also decided to move future mayoral elections to coincide with presidential elections.

So here we are again — another San Jose mayoral election — but this time Mahan has only token opposition. As he promised when he ran before, Mahan has sought common ground with the labor-dominated council and found ways to collaborate in the best interests of city residents. He also convinced the council to adopt his four top priorities — homelessness, public safety, trash and blight, and economic development.

Mahan has been especially relentless about homelessness. As he was starting his mayoral term last year, more than 4,000 people were living [on the city's streets](#). He insists, correctly, that quicker strategies must be found to get more people indoors. Last year, he forged a compromise with the council to allocate more money from the city's real estate transfer tax for construction of quick-build interim solutions such as tiny homes, hotel rooms and safe parking sites rather than on permanent housing that can take years to build and cost as much as \$1 million a unit.

As more tech employees work from their distant homes, city officials must rethink their dreams of a downtown lined with glossy commercial office space. So, Mahan is looking at other ways to revitalize the heart of San Jose. He sees a yearning for social experiences, such as festivals, live music, conferences and parties. And he's pressing for high-density residential projects as a way to provide downtown foot traffic and bring back the city's nightlife. It's a vision that matches the post-pandemic reality — a pivoting to meet the moment.

Mahan's single challenger is Tyrone Wade, a retired marriage and family crisis counselor who garnered less than 3% of the vote when he ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 2018 against Liccardo. Wade's top priorities include addressing the homeless crisis, reforming the police department with better training and pay, and advocating for a universal, citywide health plan. Wade lacks the experience for such a demanding political office.

This leaves Mahan as the only credible candidate. This paper recommended him for mayor in 2022, and since then he has consistently worked to fulfill his campaign promises and address San Jose's biggest problems. We believe his creative vision can position the city for a post-pandemic future.

District 2 – Lopez

Incumbent Sergio Jimenez, completing a second consecutive term representing District 2 in South San Jose, is barred by the city's term limits law from seeking reelection.

Four candidates are vying to fill the seat. The standout is Joe Lopez, a retired sergeant who spent 35 years working for the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department and has a firm grasp of the issues challenging the city. He says he entered the race out of concerns about the city's homeless crisis, blight and crime.



Joe Lopez (Photo courtesy of Joe Lopez)

In addition to his law enforcement career, Lopez, a 54-year resident of the city, brings a solid resume of community service, including serving on the San Jose Human Services Commission, the city's Board of Fair Campaign and Political Practices and the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury. He is also president of the National Latino Peace Officers Association of Santa Clara County.

The other candidates in the race are Vanessa Sandoval, who is Jimenez's chief of staff; Pamela Campos, a policy and program officer with the Low Income Investment Fund in San Francisco and a member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Policy Advisory Council; and Babu Prasad, the owner of two small retail businesses.

Sandoval and Campos are also well-versed on city issues, but it's Lopez who is best aligned with the mayor's vision for the city. Lopez ran unsuccessfully for City Council in 2016. If he

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fares better this time, he will be a solid addition to San Jose's governing board.

District 4 – Cohen

Councilmember David Cohen is running for reelection to this business-heavy district that includes Alviso and much of North San Jose. Originally elected with the strong support of labor, Cohen has proven to be a smart and independent thinker on the council who deserves a second term.

A chemical engineer and manager of the computational modeling group at Lam Research, which designs and builds products for semiconductor manufacturing, Cohen served on the Berryessa Union School Board for 14 years before he won the council seat in 2020.



David Cohen (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)

Cohen supports the conversion of downtown office space to housing if market conditions will support it. Despite his prior union support, Cohen eyes with skepticism an expected labor push for special city rights for fast-food workers, preferring to watch for additional actions by the state's new fast food council.

Cohen faces a challenge from Kansen Chu, who also served on the Berryessa school board before joining the City Council. Chu served two terms on the council and then, in 2014, he won election to the state Assembly where he served three unremarkable terms before trying to return to local politics in 2020.

It's been politically downhill for him since. Chu was resoundingly defeated in his bid that year for county Board of Supervisors. Two years later, he failed to make the runoff in his attempt to win his Assembly seat back. Now, he's trying to return to the City Council but has failed to make a compelling case for why he should unseat a solid incumbent.

Chu seems like a politician in search of a place to land. Cohen has served a solid first council term and deserves another.

District 6 – Mulcahy

Four candidates are seeking to replace Councilmember Dev Davis, who must step down because she has served two consecutive terms. She represents a district on the western side of the city that includes the Willow Glen and Rose Garden neighborhoods.

The standout District 6 candidate is businessman and real estate investor Michael Mulcahy.

He is managing partner for family company SDS NexGen Partners, a San Jose-based real estate and investment firm, and former executive director at Children's Musical Theater San José. He has invested in Willow Glen properties and owns stakes in neighborhood restaurants.



Michael Mulcahy (Photo courtesy of Michael Mulcahy)

The other candidates are: Amatangelo (Angelo) Pasciuti, a retired Marine who recently moved to San Jose and quickly glommed onto ideas of his firefighter-union backers without separately vetting the plans; Alex Shoor, executive director of the pro-housing development organization Catalyze SV who feels strongly that the city should prioritize building permanent housing because interim housing, while initially cheaper, could become more expensive in the long run; and Olivia Navarro, who serves as District 6's Neighborhoods Commissioner and a union adviser but brings few concrete solutions to the city's issues.

As for Mulcahy, he agrees with Mahan on the need to use the city's limited resources for quick-build interim housing for the homeless. But he parts company with the mayor on the BART extension, saying the line should end at Diridon Station with connections to light rail. In other words, Mulcahy would bring an independent business-oriented perspective to the City Council.

District 8 – Baniwal

The City Council last year appointed Domingo Candelas to fill the vacancy created by Sylvia Arenas' election to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. Now, to keep his seat, Candelas must stand for election in the Evergreen and Silver Creek neighborhoods' District 8.

Candelas faces opposition from a San Jose police sergeant, a former executive assistant who says she's running to correct "massive corruption" in Santa Clara County, and a software engineer manager who has been a leader in the city's Sikh community.



Sukhdev Singh Baniwal (Photo courtesy of Sukhdev Singh Baniwal)

The latter, Sukhdev Singh Baniwal, is the strongest candidate in the field. His top priorities include public safety, addressing homelessness and supporting small businesses. He supports Mahan's focus on providing interim housing to get more unhoused people into

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basic shelters and connected to services.

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To help revitalize downtown, he proposes subsidizing businesses to move to the area with services such as loan programs. Bainiwal would also like to see subsidized housing for police, teachers and firefighters. As for the planned BART extension to Santa Clara, he supports the line ending at Diridon Station, where riders can then take advantage of Caltrain.

Bainiwal has lived in the area of District 8 for 46 years, since childhood. He is a former member of the San Jose Airport Commission and serves as board director of the Sikh Gurdwara San Jose temple, one of the largest Sikh temples outside India.

To be sure, Candelas brings strength from his years working as district director for Jim Beall when he was a state senator. And San Jose police sergeant Tam Truong is naturally strong on public safety, although less adept at finding solutions to other city challenges.

Surinder Kaur Dhaliwal is the fourth candidate. When asked to explain why she was running, she explained that she wants to clean up perceived county corruption. It was unclear why she felt serving on the City Council would help her achieve that goal.

For a thoughtful candidate with leadership experience and deep roots in the community, voters should support Bainiwal.

District 10 – Batra

Mahan was halfway through his City Council term representing Almaden Valley's District 10 when he was elected mayor in 2022. To fill the vacancy, the county appointed Arjun Batra, who voters should now support for a full term.



Arjun Batra (Photo courtesy of Arjun Batra)

A former Intel Corp. executive, Batra has used his time on the council well, developing an understanding of San Jose's knottiest challenges. He supports Mahan's emphasis on interim housing over building affordable homes, reasoning that the current homeless crisis cannot wait years for expensive housing for a few people. However, he warns that temporary housing brings its own risks, since operating costs can spiral upward over time.

Batra also believes it's time to re-examine the BART extension to Santa Clara, noting that the region and the project's costs have changed dramatically since the plan was designed. Finally, he warns against converting high-vacancy office space into housing without serious consideration.

Batra came better prepared to discuss the city's challenges than his two opponents, George Casey, a land use attorney and city planning commissioner, and Lenka Wright, who has been a spokesperson for five cities over the past 17 years, including five years for San Jose.

Batra is the candidate ready to address the city's complex issues. Voters in District 10 should give him a full term on the City Council.

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