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Candidate appointment procedure approved for town council vacancy

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga Town Council opted to appoint a candidate to fill the seat vacated by Council Member Jeanette Fritzky, who resigned in July due to health reasons. By appointing a candidate to fill the remainder of Fritzky's term, the town saves the cost of conducting a special election, which could exceed \$100,000. Fritzky was honored at the Aug. 22 council meeting by friends, family and public officials, who presented her a town proclamation. Her husband, Bob, delivered an emotional tribute to Fritzky and the audience that packed the town hall gave her a warm standing ovation. Fritzky was not present at the meeting. Her successor will be chosen through an application, interview and appointment process. The town conducted an informal poll through the League of California Cities which showed that 70 percent of California public agencies that filled the vacancy of an elected official this decade used the application-interview-appointment method. It was the procedure followed by Lafayette when it filled a vacancy on its council in 2016. "Lafayette does things the right way," Mayor Dave Trotter said.

Other council members agreed with the format, insisting that everyone who wants to run needs to be heard, and that the appointment process should be completely transparent. The transparency works both ways, as candidate applications become public record and the winning council member must fill out financial and conflict of interest forms, also for public inspection.

Candidate applications are available on the town website and must be returned to the town clerk by 5 p.m. Sept. 12. The council plans to further discuss the interview process at its meeting that evening, according to Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg.

The council must appoint Fritzky's successor by Oct. 21 or the town will have to call a special election. The winning candidate will fill out the remainder of her term, which ends in December 2020.

The appointment of Fritzky's successor is entirely separate from the two Moraga Town Council seats up for grabs on the November ballot. Vice Mayor Teresa Onoda chose to not run for re-election, leaving Trotter, the incumbent, to compete with challengers Mike McCluer and Steve Woehleke for the two seats in the November general election.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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