

WHO RUNS THE CITY?

BY KELLY KENOYER

With elections just around the corner, it's time to examine how Eugene's city government works, and what we're electing these folks to do.

Eugene has a city manager form of government, meaning that the City Council and mayor decide legislative goals and ordinances, and then hire a city manager (Eugene's is John Ruiz) to see those goals through and run the day-to-day bureaucracy of government. The city manager is one of only three direct

who select the position. City councilors are chosen by ward elections. "The councilors that we currently have represent the full range of points of view of the community," Bohman says. These councilors decide on the yearly budget (including the \$370,000 allocated for libraries and parks for next year), earthquake preparedness and summer recreation activities under the EugFUN program. Councilors also decide on the land-use codes, defining what residents can build and how the city will grow for years to come.

According to the 2016-17 budget, the city manager makes \$212,825.60 a year. City councilors get an annual stipend of \$14,527.

Of the eight wards in Eugene, four are up for election next month. But only Ward 1 has an open seat, with candidates Emily Semple and Joshua Skov competing for the position. Eugene will also see a change in the mayor, as current Mayor Kitty Piercy retires after 12 years in office.

Technically, the position of mayor is also an open seat

mayor's role isn't quite so powerful legislatively, but she still sets the agendas, runs council meetings and represents the city at every level.

For instance, Piercy says she "just went on a trip on the behalf of the State Department to work on the U.S.-China climate summit on behalf of our city." Piercy says that she has "an opportunity to work on the international stage."

Piercy says her job is to bring the community together and get the people focused on things that really matter. "People think as mayor you're more powerful than you

EUGENE HAS A CITY MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT:

This means that the City Council is supposed to make policy and set the budget while the city manager carries out day-to-day administrative operations.

employees to the council and mayor, and he is in charge of the city staff in all departments. Councilors and the mayor go through the city manager to work within departments.

Jan Bohman, the city's community relations director, says: "I think one of the strengths of the city manager form of government is that it doesn't change when the political people change. We're going to have a new mayor, for example, but that doesn't mean we're going to have a new city manager."

Past city managers have held the unelected position for as long as 15 years, and Ruiz has been in the position since 2008.

Although voters have no direct say in exactly who fills the role of city manager, they can vote for those

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this election. However, Lucy Vinis received 50 percent plus one in the May primary over Councilor Mike Clark, so only her name will appear on the ballot.

The mayor does not have a vote in council meetings except as a tiebreaker. Councilor Chris Pryor of Ward 8 says, "In past administrations, there was a pretty equal split between the city councilors. A 4-4 split occurred all the time." This led to a lot of tiebreaking votes, Pryor says, and the impression that the mayor has a lot of power.

Now that there are fewer 4-4 ties on the council, the

THE MAYOR IS THE TIEBREAKING VOTE

on the Eugene City Council.

are, so you may as well leverage what you've got," she says with a laugh.

She continues, "When I became mayor there were certain people who were welcome at City Hall and certain people who weren't. And I wanted everyone to feel welcome at City Hall so I opened the door for everyone."

Eugene tore down its City Hall and currently holds meetings in Harris Hall at Lane County's Public Services building, with offices scattered throughout the city.

Ward 1 candidate Semple says she thinks the culture could get even better. As far as accessibility goes, Semple says, "meeting minutes should be up just as soon as the meetings are done," and they should be written minutes, in addition to videos.

"The better the information, the better the public comments," Semple says, adding that the city manager form of government has created too many barriers between the people and the institution of government, and that it's time for more transparency and communication between council and staff at City Hall.

"I don't know all the answers and solutions but I'm ready to ask the right questions," Semple says.

In every election, the biggest impact citizens can make with their vote is on the local level. As Councilor Pryor says, "local elections can be decided by very few votes. It doesn't take a lot to make a difference."

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