

Supervisor candidates address community group

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

APTOS — A community action group made up of 24 nonprofits, churches and schools gathered at Temple Beth El Monday, where they asked Santa Cruz County supervisor candidates for their

support on a range of issues. Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action is in the midst of its Stand Up and Take Charge campaign, with the goal of gathering 30,000 signatures and garnering community support for its adopted issues of housing, health, community

safety, economic opportunity, immigration and education.

On the stage were 1st District incumbent John Leopold, and the candidates vying for his seat, Gary Arnold and Charles Paulden.

Second District candidates Rich McInnis, Antonio Rivas

and Zach Friend were also in attendance.

"It is our intent for you to be very clear about our agenda," COPA member Ken Thomas told the candidates.

As a non-partisan and non-

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denominational organization, COPA does not endorse candidates, said member Rocco Cappalla.

"We believe that people have the ability to discern what the candidates are saying and make their own decisions," Cappalla said.

As an example of what COPA does, member Jon Showalter said the organization worked with 50 South County families facing foreclosure to help them stay in their homes during the housing crisis.

COPA is currently trying to pass a local ordinance that requires banks to mediate with homeowners before they foreclose on them, Showalter said.

Rosario Melendez of Pajaro talked about having to make the choice between paying her mortgage and feeding her family, but was helped through a loan modification.

"I realized I wasn't the only one in this situation," she said.

COPA organizers also say they want to simplify the county's complicated zoning ordinances, which they say will make it easier for small businesses to establish themselves.

When asked whether they would support COPA's agenda, First District Supervisor Leopold and candidates Arnold and Paulden agreed.

Leopold said he ran because the residents came to him and said they wanted better access to their supervisor. He said he meets monthly with his constituents to discuss and solve the problems that concern them.

Paulden said he has been working with housing issues and community health.

"I think we need a living wage for farm workers," he said. "I think working together we can do more."

McInnis seemed to be speaking directly to COPA's agenda by discussing his intention to implement a foreclosure moratorium immediately upon taking office.

He also said that the county's rules made it extremely difficult to reopen after being red-

tagged.

"If I can beat the fire marshal and the planning department by myself, just imagine what I can do with COPA," he said.

Similarly, Friend said he supports COPA's agenda, and told a story about a friend who lost his home two months after having a baby.

"There are actually a lot of voices that aren't being heard," Friend said.

Former Watsonville mayor Antonio Rivas said that, as a former City Council member, he has been committed to the issues in COPA's agenda for years.

"It's important for me to make sure we can provide affordable housing," he said.

Rivas added that the county has not yet taken on poverty as a governmental body.

After the meeting, member Dean Lundholm said he left feeling better informed about his candidate of choice.

Rabbi Paula Marcus of Temple Beth El said the meeting showed COPA's power to bring diverse groups together to work for a variety of issues.

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