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Council appoints new planning commissioners: Giselle Roohparvar and Carolyn Templeton to join seven-member panel (Palo Alto Online)

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By Gennady Sheyner / Palo Alto Weekly

A land-use attorney and a retired Google manager won appointments this week to Palo Alto's influential Planning and Transportation Commission.

Giselle Roohparvar, an attorney with the firm Miller Starr Regalia, easily won appointment to the commission, earning support from eight of the nine City Council members (only Councilman Greg Tanaka opted to vote for other candidates). And after several rounds of voting, Carolyn Templeton, a retired technical manager at Google, edged out Thomas Siegel for the second open seat. All five members of the council's pro-growth wing supported Templeton, while their four slow-growth colleagues all voted for Siegel, who is also a Google employee.

The two new commissioners will replace current commission Vice Chair Susan Monk and former Vice Chair Przemek Gardias, both of whom are concluding their terms this month. Neither has reapplied for a new term.

In her application, Roohparvar touted her experience in reviewing and evaluating zoning codes, charters and other technical documents and said she is sensitive to the different perspectives that exist when a project is being evaluated.

"I want to help grow and enhance our community while also being thoughtful and deliberate in how that happens, so that such growth makes sense for all stakeholders," Roohparvar wrote.

Templeton, who in 2017 retired from her position as a technical program manager at Google, is a member of the recently appointed North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan working group, which is working to craft a new vision for a portion of the Ventura neighborhood, which includes the Fry's Electronics site. In her application, she said she feels particularly strongly about protecting trees and improving city processes that have become "dated and inconsistent."

She also pointed to recent commission decisions that went against the council's and the community's wishes, causing widespread frustration.

"As a result, public trust in the City government has eroded somewhat," she wrote. "I believe that we can do better, and that we can rebuild that trust."

The two commissioners vied with 11 others, including former mayors Bern Beecham and Dena Mossar, for positions on the seven-member panel, which has played a leading role this year in revising the zoning code to encourage more housing.

In a separate vote, the council voted not to reappoint veteran Architectural Review Board member and former Chair Robert Gooyer. His position will now be occupied by David Hirsch, a retired architect who is affiliated with the citizens group Palo Alto Forward, which advocates for more housing. All four slow-growth council members supported Gooyer, while the five members who support more growth-friendly policies voted for Hirsch.

Two other Architectural Review Board members easily won reappointment, with Peter Baltay and Alexander Lew both securing widespread council support.

The council also reappointed all three incumbents — Anne Crips, David Moss and Jeff Greenfield, to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Only one other candidate had applied for the position.