

# TOP COP RESOLUTION UP TO VOTERS ELECTION OR APPOINTMENT? SANTA CLARANS WILL DECIDE

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Following ardent pleas by Santa Clara Police Chief Frank Vasquez and former Chief Manny Ferguson, the city council has reversed itself and decided to let voters determine whether future chiefs should be appointed or elected.

"I've never, ever believed an elected police chief is something we should have," Ferguson told the council Tuesday night. "For a city of our size, it's unbelievably medieval."

Vasquez, who has been outspoken about wanting an appointment system, repeated his belief that the current system creates divisiveness within the police department before each election.

"It's demeaning for the position," he said of the election process.

Councilman Dave DeLozier cast the deciding vote that will give residents a chance to amend the city charter, which governs city operations. Last week, he had been part of the council majority that maintained voters should continue to elect the city's top cop and that a ballot question to change the charter was unnecessary.

The reversal was the second in a week on a major matter. Last week, the council voted to exempt bars and bingo parlors from a tough anti-smoking ordinance it already had approved.

"I'm just looking at it as an option for the citizens," DeLozier said, adding that he believes Santa Clara voters probably will choose to keep the present selection system. "It's something that's been bantered about for 20 years, and this will put it behind us once and for all."

The question of amending the city charter will be asked on the June 7 ballot. On the same ballot, voters will be asked to pick a chief to replace Vasquez, who retires Feb. 12. The elected police chief will serve until November 1996, when Vasquez's term would have expired. If the amendment passes, that chief then would have to be appointed by the city manager to stay on the job.

Those on the council who have argued to change the system say that electing a police chief is archaic for a city with nearly 100,000 people. They want to be able to choose from a pool of experienced applicants, perhaps from across the country.

The only requirements for candidates for the elected position are that they be at least 18 years old and residents of Santa Clara. That, Councilman Tim Jeffries said, is "scary."

Voters "may be batting 1.000" in electing capable police chiefs for the past 20 years, he said, "but sooner or later, hitting streaks come to an end."

Added Councilwoman Judy Nadler: "If they (voters) decide it's just fine the way it is, then we've affirmed the charter." The fourth vote in support of the June ballot measure was Keri Procunier.

Mayor Everett "Eddie" Souza and council members Lisa Gillmor and Jim Ash say they support having the chief elected directly by voters because it makes the chief directly responsible to the people.

"We have a system that works," Souza said. "I'd rather have someone that understands Santa Clara, the community and the county than someone from Pocatello, Idaho."

He also questioned the timing of the request by Vasquez and Ferguson, saying, "If it was so bad, why didn't you come forward before?"

"I just think it's an opportune time to visit this issue," Vasquez replied. Those running for the post must declare their candidacy between Feb. 14 and March 13.

Caption:

PhotoPHOTO: Dave DeLozier cast the deciding vote that will give residents a chance to amend the city charter.

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