

Crime, infrastructure priority of new councilor

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 01 September 2023 04:32



Three candidates put their hats in the ring for District 4 City Councilor after Councilor Fran Palochak stepped down at the July 25 council meeting.

The council held interviews on Aug. 21 in a special meeting. The council voted on the matter at the Aug. 22 meeting, and Ron Molina, who owns Ron Molina Gas Services, was elected.

Molina was born and raised in Belen, N.M., but he moved to Gallup in 1964 after he was offered a District Manager job in the city.

“Gallup’s been good to [my family},” Molina said during his interview.

Molina admitted he didn’t know much about city government and how it is run. The first city council meeting he ever attended was the Aug. 8 one where they announced they would be looking for a new District 4 councilor.

“...I’m not a politician,” Molina said. “A lot of people accuse me of [being a politician] because I like people, that’s the only political thing in me.”

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Molina said he only ran for the councilor position after a friend asked him.

As for his goals as a councilor, Molina said he wants to see change in the city's crime rate and infrastructure.

"The crime is not as large here as it is in other towns, but ... the petty crimes are ridiculous here in Gallup," Molina said. "I've got a lot to learn about it yet, I don't know where the problem is. I know it's not in the police department because they responded all the time to break-ins in my house, vehicle, and my ranch."

When it comes to infrastructure, Molina has some experience with that already. Besides gas, his company also does plumbing work where they often dig up streets. Molina said they often find problems with the sewer and water systems.

"In my work we work with the city's infrastructure, and we've had to repair some of the city's infrastructure because it just comes apart if we tap a line or something like that," Molina explained.

The city councilors and Mayor Louie Bonaguidi voted for who should replace Palochak. Bonaguidi and Michael Schaaf, Dist. 2, voted for Molina. It was later determined that the new councilor couldn't be elected on only two out of four votes, so a second vote was done and Councilor Linda Garcia, Dist. 1, gave Molina her vote as well.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Bonaguidi said he chose Molina over the two candidates based on a "gut feeling."

"... [With the majority of the candidates,] you could tell they're not real sure about how the city runs, so you can't base [your decision] off that. So you have to go off a gut feeling, is this person going to be easy to work with?" Bonaguidi explained.

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Schaaf called Molina a down-to-earth and level-headed candidate.

“I think he’ll be a good fit with the rest of the council,” Schaaf said.

Molina’s term will end when Palochak’s orginial term is over in March. He can then choose to run for his own election.

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