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## Guest opinion: Atherton mayor looks back on the year

by Jim Janz

As I finish out my year as Atherton's mayor, I am also completing my second term on the city council. After 18 years of service on the council and the planning commission, I have decided to step down and allow others the opportunity to make a contribution to the town.

At the beginning of my term as mayor, I delivered the "State of the City" address in January, urging the council to focus on the big issues and to focus more on the future than on the past or present. I encouraged the council to be proactive, to stop reacting to events, and to deal with issues before they become problems.

In January I identified a range of issues before us, some that will take years to resolve, but here's how we've begun to address some of them:

- Examine the relationship between the council and staff in order to streamline administration, while maintaining adequate public oversight.

In the last nine months we have hired a new city manager, who in turn has hired a new police chief, a new finance director and an assistant city manager. In March, we held our first-ever City Council retreat and workshop, a two-day event.

It was followed a few weeks later with a full-day retreat that included the council and senior staff. The goal of these meetings was to have the council focus on "big picture" items, and to develop confidence that the staff would operate the town services, and implement the goals and objectives that the council developed in the workshops.

- Relations with other cities and districts, public safety agencies, and high-speed rail.

We have developed relationships with our neighboring cities and districts that did not exist before. We now have a very friendly and effective working relationship with our fire district — one that is probably the model for the district.

We have also worked with Menlo Park and its council members on several issues at a joint meeting in January and a study session on high-speed rail in September. In August, Atherton joined Menlo Park, several rail groups, and the California Planning and Conservation League to challenge the adequacy of the environmental impact report prepared for the high-speed rail project. This was done at no cost to either city, and by working together, the impact of each city's voice was greatly enhanced.

- Explored new opportunities for increasing revenue, housing and redeveloping neighboring areas.

To meet fiscal needs and state housing requirements, I suggested that the city explore annexing some adjacent unincorporated areas. The tax support from even a limited amount of commercial development might be able to replace the parcel tax. And, annexation might provide the space for development of some multi-family housing that would help meet state requirements.

The concept of annexing some adjacent areas has so far been favorably received by the county, Redwood City, and the Local Agency Formation Commission. I encourage the council to continue to work on these relationships, and to pursue this concept to see if a consensus can be developed.

Finally, I want to say that there will be change, and the challenge ahead is to make sure those changes happen on our terms, not on someone else's. My service to the town has been an educational and rewarding experience, and I can only wish equal satisfaction to my successors. I assume that Vice Mayor Jerry Carlson will be mayor next year, and I am confident that he, along with our new and very-qualified city manager, Jerry Gruber, will do a terrific job.

Jim Janz is currently Mayor of Atherton