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IJ's 3 CHOICES FOR NOVATO COUNCIL

— STAFF REPORT

THE SIX candidates for three seats on the Novato City Council pretty much agree on the major challenges facing the city — finances, facilities and a clogged freeway.

The trick is to elect the three who offer the best chance of making progress in those and other areas, including how to shape the city's retail landscape (big-box chains need not apply).

Incumbents Jeanne MacLeamy and Carole Dillon-Knutson are joined in the race by: Annan Paterson, who just missed out on a seat two years ago; Madeline Kellner, a member of the Planning Commission; Don Ricco Jr., a letter carrier and Novato native; and Eleanor Sluis, who also ran two years ago.

MacLeamy, 62, an architect, has been impressive during her first term. She has been the driving force behind the new City Hall and created long-overdue momentum in that area. She is committed to getting the city's budget in order and addressing deferred maintenance and a crumbling infrastructure. These aren't sexy issues, but they are crucial to Novato's future stability and quality of life.

Dillon-Knutson, 65, is seeking a fourth term. She has served as mayor twice and is a member of the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit board. She says the increasing congestion on Highway 101 must be addressed through transit alternatives. She says Novato's anemic retail base is a chronic problem and that encouraging more retail growth is crucial. Her experience is an asset to the City Council.

Paterson, 52, is a school guidance counselor and president of Sustainable Novato. She says too many residents feel disconnected with the democratic process. She says controlling growth is vital; she was a strong opponent of Home Depot's failed attempt to build a store in Novato. She believes the city can solve its retail revenue problems by persuading local residents to shop at local stores.

Kellner, 54, is a health-care consultant who once was the county's public health services director. She says Novato is changing, with demographics a big reason, and Novato needs to people with vision to steer that change. Her experience on the Planning Commission during a crucial period is a plus. She is a proponent of transit alternatives and voted for SMART last year, but wants to see more details about how the system will work, including shuttle service, before she decides whether to vote for the train the next time it's on the ballot.

Ricco, 37, has enthusiasm but needs to learn more about how the city works. We urge him to get more involved, perhaps with one of his passions, which is reopening the Novato Theater.

Sluis, 71, is an environmentalist who is skeptical of most development. She is sharply critical of City Hall and accuses it of allowing Novato to be "blackmailed" by big corporations. She calls SMART too expensive and doubts it will work.

MacLeamy and Dillon-Knutson are easy choices.

Paterson and Kellner are strong candidates for the third seat — and both have different strengths. We come down on the side of Kellner's experience in city and county government and her background in health care. She knows how to solve problems and manage a budget. Paterson has been involved in many key areas over the past several years. We hope she remains involved — Novato needs her energy and passion.

The IJ endorses Jeanne MacLeamy, Carole Dillon-Knutson and Madeline Kellner for Novato City Council on Nov. 6.