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YOLO COUNTY NEWS



Dan Carson, chair of the city's Finance and Budget Commission, has set his sights on a Davis City Council seat. Fred Gladdis/Enterprise photo

Local News

Carson announces Davis City Council bid

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

Longtime Davis resident Dan Carson — a former journalist and government analyst — became the fifth person to announce a run for Davis City Council this week.

With several more candidates likely to announce in the days ahead, the field to fill two open seats on the council in June could reach eight or more. Those seats opened up as both Davis Mayor Robb Davis and Councilwoman Rochelle Swanson said last week that they will not seek re-election in June.

It was the looming departures of Davis and Swanson — long rumored — that prompted Carson to start seriously thinking about running earlier this year.

Both of them, Carson said, “have been champions of fiscal and economic issues that are important.”

He said he didn't see any candidates coming in to fill those shoes, so after discussions with many different people over the course of about six months, Carson decided to throw his hat into the race.

Carson brings a deep understanding of the city's fiscal and economic state to his City Council bid, thanks in part to the past three years spent serving on the Davis Finance and Budget Commission, including as chair.

But his expertise in government policy and finance actually stretches back decades.

Carson grew up in the Chicago area, moving to California during his senior year in high school. After earning a degree in journalism and political science from San Francisco State University, he enjoyed a long journalism career that included covering city hall in San Diego for the San Diego Union and later joining the paper's Capitol bureau, as chief, in 1982.

Ten years later, he left journalism to work on an MBA at UC Davis (and serve as “Mr. Mom,” he said, to his three sons while his wife Maureen continued working full-time for the city of Vacaville).

Carson figured he'd go back into the newspaper business after earning his MBA, “but I could see the death spiral

starting in that business,” he recalled.

With three kids to put through college, he instead took a position with the state Legislative Analyst’s Office — the independent, nonpartisan agency that provides fiscal and policy advice to lawmakers.

Carson started as a corrections analyst in 1995, and moved up through the ranks, developing expertise in health, social services, transportation, criminal justice and more, and spending his last few years as deputy legislative analyst.

Because of his experience, Carson said, “I know how to ask tough questions and turn that information into practical reforms that benefit the public.

“My practice is to reach out and listen carefully to the views of others, especially those who might disagree with me, as I make decisions.”

He retired from the LAO in 2012 and not long after, he turned his attention to the city of Davis, where he’s lived with his family for nearly 30 years.

Reading headlines in *The Enterprise* about the city’s structural budget deficit, “I thought, ‘I can help with this,’ ” Carson said.

In 2014, he was appointed to the city’s Finance and Budget Commission, which he now chairs.

“Right off the bat I had a real chance to participate in the process, and did a deep dive into the city’s fiscal condition,” he said.

Carson notes that over the next 20 years, Davis is projected to face a roughly \$8 million-per-year gap in the resources it needs to keep city services and facilities humming.

“With the help of my commission colleagues, I have pushed for greater transparency in how ... city money is used and meaningful actions to hold down the cost of our city government,” he said.

“We’re making progress,” Carson added, noting recent council discussions about cost containment, as well as a focus on economic development and using surplus city assets to generate additional revenue. One such consideration: moving the city’s corporation yard elsewhere so that Fifth Street land could be used to generate revenue.

The commission he chairs also helped spark the development of a 20-year long-range forecast for the city “which really gave clarity to the city’s financial circumstances,” he said.

Carson believes these efforts are vital if Davis is to maintain what residents love most about their city.

“My wife and I have had a great life here in town,” he said. “We really appreciate the quality of life here, but we do see some real challenges.”

To preserve things like bike paths and greenbelts, roads and municipal services, he said, “We need to get our fiscal house in order.”

“It’s not time to panic,” he added, “but we do need to take serious actions to get there.

“I’m an optimist. I think we can solve this problem,” he said, adding that “with the talent pool we have in this town ... your problems are opportunities. It’s how you can work with others to make things happen that is important.”

That means pulling together the many resources Davis has to offer, he said, from churches to charities to service groups to “the volunteer experts we see on our city commissions.”

“We need to reach out and pull people into the process. Not everybody is comfortable going down to City Hall and testifying,” Carson said, “We need to make sure everyone gets a voice in what we do.”

Some issues, he noted, like homelessness, are particularly challenging to solve.

“It’s a human tragedy, what’s going on. Obviously it does impact our downtown businesses ... but I think we can work to make progress and make things better.”

Davis has led before, he noted, on environmental issues and more, “and I think we can do that again.”

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net or 530-747-8051.

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Daniel Carson · Chair at Finance and Budget Commission

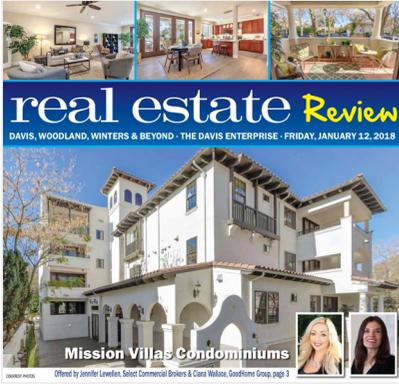
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