

San Jose District 5 candidates square off

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Posted: 02/12/2010 12:49:30 AM PST

Updated: 02/12/2010 12:49:31 AM PST

The contest to succeed outgoing San Jose City Councilwoman Nora Campos got an early start Thursday night with the four contenders squaring off in a candidate forum at the Tropicana shopping center, the site of a bruising redevelopment battle that cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

Though the official nominating period for candidates in the June 8 primary opens next week and closes in mid-March, voters in the city's council District 5 — centered in the Alum Rock area — saw the four hopefuls talk about what they could do if elected to improve things in the East Side.

Xavier Campos, 43, the incumbent's brother, is a city planning commissioner and aide to county Supervisor George Shirakawa.

He said he would continue his sister's efforts that have produced a "renaissance" in the district.

"In the last 10 years we have seen tremendous progress in District 5," said Campos, who so far leads the pack in fundraising.

J. Manuel Herrera, 61, a 20-year trustee of the Eastside Union High School District and the only other candidate to show significant fundraising in the last reporting period, touted his efforts to

improve education.

"My vision is for establishing a safer, more successful East Side," Herrera said.

Aaron Resendez, 49, a press operator and longtime neighborhood activist who joined the race last month, presented himself as a government outsider.

"Our community has suffered a lot," Resendez said. "It's time for change."

Magdalena Carrasco, 42, the newest entrant who works for First 5 Santa Clara County, said she wasn't a professional politician but a mother of four who works to secure the needs of families and kids.

"This campaign is not about the nicest logos or the best buzzwords," Carrasco said, "it's who you trust to champion the issues near and dear to the community."

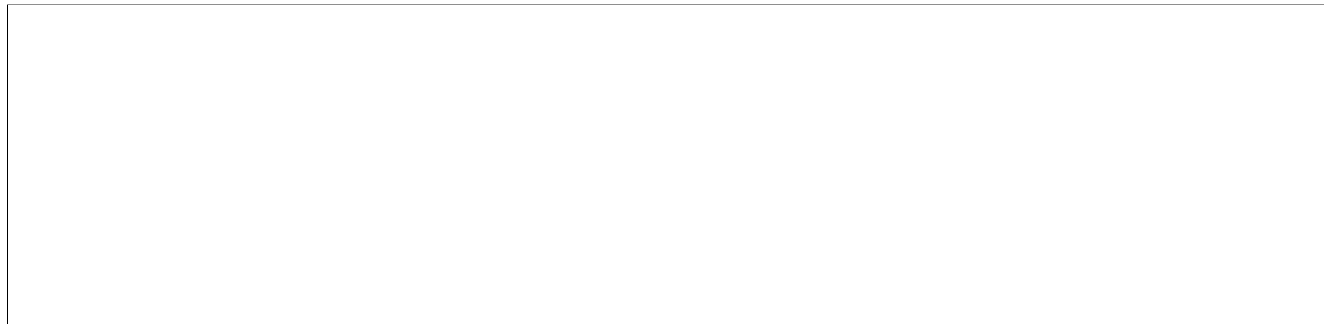
None of the questions from the audience or sponsors, including the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Silicon Valley, the Tropicana Merchants Association and La Raza Roundtable, addressed the core concern consuming City Hall: a nine-year run of red ink that has resulted in service cuts and confrontations with powerful employee unions.

Some of the more pointed questions came from the Tropicana merchants addressing the city's failed 2003 eminent domain takeover of the shopping center that ended in settlements costing taxpayers \$8 million.

Campos, whose sister had supported that effort, said he shared her vision to revitalize the area.

Resendez acknowledged that he "made mistakes" in

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his involvement with the issue for "lack of understanding."

Herrera said it was a "well-intentioned" effort but needed more community involvement.

Carrasco said the city needs to "do everything within its legislative powers to support small-business owners."

Longtime district resident Elsie Aranda, 53, said she hasn't decided which candidate she'll support.

"Whoever does win in District 5," she said, "they have a large job ahead of them."

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