



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOLA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

How a Candidate for City Council Can Lose an Election... and Still Get on Council

The unintended consequence of our move to district elections

Usually when someone runs for office and loses, they don't get to serve in that role. But because of an unintended consequence of Los Altos' transition from at-large elections—where everyone votes for every City Council member—to district elections—where only residents of a district vote for their district's representative—we could end up with exactly that result.

How is this possible?

Council Member Larry Lang's current term doesn't expire until 2028. He has now filed to run for the open District 4 seat, a different council seat with a new four-year term that would run from 2026 to 2030. According to Lang, he does not plan to resign his current seat before the election.

That means one thing is certain: regardless of the election's outcome, he remains on the City Council.

If he loses the District 4 election, he simply continues serving the remainder of his current term through 2028.

If he wins, he moves into the District 4 seat, creating a vacancy in the seat he was elected to serve until 2028.

Heads I win, tails I win?

But as residents, we lose.

If Lang wins the District 4 seat, the City Council would then have to either appoint someone to fill his former seat until the 2028 election or call a special election in early 2027 at an estimated cost of \$50,000 to \$100,000. Either way, voters lose the opportunity to be represented in a timely and cost-effective manner.

We appreciate Council Member Lang's desire to seek another term on the City Council. But if he intends to run for a different seat, we believe he should resign his current seat in a timely manner. That would allow candidates to run for the seat he is vacating and give voters the opportunity to elect the entire City Council they will be represented by in November 2026.

If he chooses not to resign, then we hope voters conclude that democracy is better served by electing someone else to represent District 4.

Los Altos adopted district elections to give voters more direct representation and a stronger voice in choosing their council members. That goal is undermined if an avoidable vacancy allows the remaining council members to appoint one of their own colleagues' successors instead of letting the voters decide.

In the spirit of fairness, this unintended consequence of district elections shouldn't become a feature that benefits one candidate.

And that is the way we see it.

Friend of Los Altos Board of Directors

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