

New councilmembers share similarities

Following tradition, City Council newcomers share their thoughts about their first terms with *Downtown Dimension*.

What are your primary objectives for your first year?

Matt Mahan: I ran for office to make local government more responsive to residents and accountable for addressing quality-of-life issues affecting our neighborhoods. As I knocked on some 10,000 doors in District 10 during the campaign the vast majority of residents brought up public safety, homelessness and core services, such as road paving. I'll focus on building trust with voters by showing that the city can address those concerns effectively and efficiently.

I think the best way to do this is to invest in our performance management systems so city staff and the public can see our service goals, how we're currently doing, what we're trying to improve, and what we're learning as we optimize service delivery. I've been calling this a "KPI dashboard," but really I'm pushing for culture change that leads to greater focus and accountability for positively impacting residents' lives.

David Cohen: During my first 100 days, I plan to build a constituent service organization, to be better prepared to respond to resident needs and create an infrastructure to track, monitor and quickly resolve resident concerns. Making strategic investments in all our neighborhoods, from Alviso and River Oaks to Orchard and Berryessa, so that they are clean and safe for our residents, will be a major focus during the first year.

Given the importance of development in North San Jose and around the Berryessa BART Station, I will also focus on updating the North San Jose Plan and building a closer relationship with the cities of Santa Clara and Milpitas so that we can resume building more housing. Building affordable housing as an integral component of this work is going to be a priority for me, as well as focusing on sustainable development practices.

What do you anticipate the biggest challenge to be?

Cohen: I enter office during a particularly challenging time. Providing economic support for individuals and businesses who are adversely affected by the COVID-19 closures will continue to be a priority. We will have lots of work to do to continue to encourage safe behavior so that we can get to a place where we can safely get our economy moving. The resulting budget shortfall from the pandemic will force the Council to have to make many difficult decisions in the upcoming year.

Mahan: Leading in government is very different from leading in business. As a CEO, I worked closely with my team to set goals, support execution and deliver the product to our target customer. Serving on the City Council is more like being on a board of directors, but we're responsible for serving all customers (i.e., residents) at once and we're not necessarily aligned on priorities, so the process is much slower. We have to take more time to find common ground and manage competing interests. There's often a good reason for all of this extra process, but I'm finding that it requires a different mindset.

What do you miss most about downtown during COVID-19?

Mahan: I miss a lot of things, but especially being able to meet with people face-to-face at one of our great downtown coffee shops, such as Academic Coffee, Voltaire Coffee or Voyager Coffee. As useful as Zoom is, there's nothing like sitting across the table from someone or, even better, inviting them to step out onto the street to walk, talk, and experience the special energy that only a downtown offers. I also miss the anticipation that comes with watching new projects like The Grad



David Cohen is the Councilmember representing District 4, which includes North San Jose and Berryessa. He grew up in Northern Virginia just outside Washington DC, earned a degree in Chemical Engineering at Cornell and a PhD at UC Berkeley. He has lived in District 4 since 1998, where he has raised his family, worked in high tech, and served the community for 14 years as a member of the Berryessa School Board and 6 years on the San Jose Library Commission. He spent 21 years as an engineer and manager in Silicon Valley. He holds 10 patents and numerous articles published in journals.



Matt Mahan is the Councilmember representing District 10, which includes Almaden Valley and Blossom Valley. He previously co-founded and led Brigade, the world's first voter network; served as CEO of Causes, an early Facebook application; and was a public school teacher in Alum Rock. Matt grew up in Watsonville, attended Bellarmine College Prep on a work-study scholarship, and graduated from Harvard magna cum laude in Social Studies. He and his wife Silvia are raising their children, Nina (3) and Luke (1), in the Santa Teresa Foothills neighborhood.

and Miro rise slowly but surely from the streetscape. There was – and still is – so much potential becoming reality before our eyes.

Cohen: I miss having people socializing, patronizing our downtown businesses and enjoying what our city's center has to offer. The street fairs, farmers markets, and Sharks games make our downtown especially lively, and I miss the chance for residents to interact and enjoy the company of one another. I had been looking forward to attending this year's US Figure Skating Championships.

How important is development on the west side of downtown to downtown and the city's future?

Cohen: I believe the Downtown West development is a great opportunity for San Jose and, if done right, it can be a transformative project for our city. The plan will bring more affordable housing into the downtown core and strengthen local business. Building out around the Diridon Station is important so that we encourage more people to use BART, Caltrain, and other public transit options to commute. I also believe it's important that we hold Google accountable for the promises they have made to our community and ensure the benefits are felt by families throughout San Jose, not just Google's high tech workforce. I look forward to being part of a long and lucrative partnership between San Jose and Google.

Mahan: I don't think you can overestimate how important it is to have a company like Google build a large campus next to our most significant transit hub and future BART stop. The potential knock-on effects are huge and I think we're already seeing some of them, including sustained development interest across downtown despite COVID's impact

on the economy. It's also an opportunity to activate the Guadalupe River Park, which is just one segment of a river that runs the entire north-south length of our city from Almaden to Alviso. San Jose can and should have the world's greatest urban park and trail network centered on this central spine. We have the building blocks – flat terrain, fantastic weather, and many of the right-of-ways already in place – but we won't realize this vision until downtown has the jobs and retail density to make it economically feasible to build out.

If you could change one thing about downtown, what would it be?

Mahan: If I could snap my fingers and add 10,000 residents to downtown, I would. I've had the privilege of living in great cities like DC, Boston, and San Francisco. What works about those environments is that you have a lot of people in close proximity, and not just during working hours.

We need to figure out how to get significantly more people living and working downtown. When you look at a neighborhood like Hayes Valley in San Francisco, for example, people are drawn to it because there are already enough people living in and around the neighborhood to make a mix of restaurants, shopping, and cultural experiences viable. The people who visit from outside come for the experience, but it's the long-term residents who make it possible.

Cohen: Downtown needs more retail to draw more visitors to downtown and be a destination for residents from throughout the city. It's been hard to sustain retail downtown with the current level of residential development. I'm hopeful that as development continues, retail will thrive and downtown will become a more vibrant place.

What will it take to get your constituents to visit downtown when we start recovering from Covid?

Cohen: Once arts and sports are back in downtown San Jose, I'm hopeful that our constituents will start to come back to downtown. We also need to improve the transit connections to the downtown core. For our district, the most important work is the completion of BART to downtown, as it will be easy for District 4 residents to hop on BART at Milpitas or Berryessa and travel to Santa Clara Street.

Mahan: Downtown has been stuck in a negative feedback loop: without sufficient residents it struggles to sustain retail, which makes it a less attractive destination, and because it hasn't been a destination for many San Joseans there hasn't been enough focus on safety and cleanliness, which further reduces investment, and the cycle just self-perpetuates. We were starting to break this cycle pre-COVID – thanks to the bold investments planned by VTA/BART, Google, Jay Paul, Adobe, Urban Community, Urban Catalyst and others – and I'm optimistic that we will continue to have that long-term development momentum coming out of the crisis.

We have to keep our eye on the ball: more jobs and more housing downtown. If we press ahead, eventually that negative feedback loop will invert and people won't be able to stay away from downtown. As the youngest member of City Council, I'm confident in saying that the demand for a bustling, walkable downtown is already out there and will only grow over time.

How severe is this temporary loss of live arts, music and culture to San Jose's residents?

Mahan: It's a massive loss. The arts allow us, as a community, to express ourselves, create and share our histories, and enter into dialog across our differences. In this way, the arts are kind of like politics, but more accessible and with even more potential for creating something new and beautiful. People used to quip about starving artists just getting by, but this pandemic has been truly devastating for our artists, musicians, performers and all of those who help us get in touch with something bigger than ourselves. It will take a long time for our creative community to rebound from the pandemic but I'm confident that it will

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because there is nothing more fundamental to a community than arts and culture.

Cohen: It's been devastating not only because patrons of the arts must endure a temporary halt to our many cultural and entertainment events, but also because many people depend on the arts and venues for their livelihood. For nearly a year, those who work at our performance venues such as the Center for the Performing Arts, the Civic, California Theater and small independent venues have been out of work. Not to mention the loss of business to our downtown restaurants that depend on the crowds drawn to downtown by live performances.

At the end of four years, what would you like to have accomplished?

Cohen: My hope is to build an informed and engaged community in District 4. From my office to the neighborhoods, better communication and organization has improved and led to more neighborhood associations, businesses, and residents participating in the community. I also hope that North San Jose's development plan will be back on track and include affordable housing, local retail, community space, and dense transit-oriented development. Finally, our staff will build a customer service infrastructure to make city government more responsive to the needs of our residents.

Mahan: I hope that many more residents of District 10 and San Jose as a whole understand how their local government works and have confidence that it is accountable for delivering high-quality services. But beyond that, I hope that I've contributed to a City Hall that thinks in bigger and bolder ways about our city's future. We spend so much time debating a single project, a fee or regulatory change, or waiting on other levels of government to act. We need a step change in how we think about economic development in San Jose. I would hope that I have helped shift the mentality at City Hall, pulling back some of the process and moving faster to realize the big opportunities ahead of us.

What do you consider a downtown hidden gem?

Mahan: Honestly, I think the great spots downtown aren't any secret. I've mentioned a few of our best coffee spots, Teske's and Uproar Brewing are great places to grab a drink, lunch at Enoteca La Storia reminds me of my Italian grandmother who grew up here, and I still love taking out-of-town guests to San Pedro Square, just to name a few of my favorites. And of course, I can't reinforce enough that our river park and the natural areas that weave through downtown are truly diamonds in the rough. With some polishing, they could be San Jose's crown jewels.

Cohen: There are many hidden gems in the SoFA district. I am a big fan of MACLA and the wonderful art exhibits they often have on display. That venue, along with the Museum of Quilts and Textiles and the Museum of Contemporary Art make that small stretch of the city well worth visiting.

Downtown News



Mural portrays American hero Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

RBG honored in mural: A five-story mural of former Supreme Court Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** by **Chuba Oyolu** now adorns the west-facing side of the 110-year-old building at Santa Clara and First Streets, currently undergoing an extensive rehab by owner DivcoWest, scheduled to be finished in March. The ground floor corner formerly occupied by Walgreen's is designated for retail. The nine stories have between 7,000 and 12,000 square feet of tenant space. The building, expanded in 1951, totals 98,000 square feet.

DivcoWest has been contemplating a mural since acquiring the building in 2017.

"It's such a visible downtown location and that large wall almost begs for art to be on it," said DivcoWest representative **Andrew Neilly**.

DivcoWest liked artist Oyolu's work and asked him to paint RBG. "She's such an American hero and with what we've all been through in the last year, we need our heroes now more than ever," Neilly said. "RBG was more than a Supreme Court justice of historic stature, she was a cultural icon, a role model and inspiration to so many people everywhere," Neilly said. "We wanted to remind future generations of her energy and grace."

The artist was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and lives in San Bruno.

South Hall shelter: The South Hall behind the Convention Center will continue to serve as a temporary emergency shelter for the homeless through April 30, and until June 30 if needed, in order to provide resources for the unhoused during the pandemic.

Many homeless have medical conditions that affect their immune systems, leaving them in a dangerous position should they contract the virus. Temporary shelters are needed as the weather gets colder and shelter-in-place orders are extended, said City Housing Director **Jacky**

Morales-Ferrand: From April 15 to Nov. 30, 2020, the South Hall hosted 902 individuals. The 80,000-square-foot tent structure is set up to provide shelter for up to 285 socially distanced people per night.

At its Jan. 12 meeting, the City Council agreed to provide a \$3.1 million grant to HomeFirst Services of Santa Clara County to continue to operate the South Hall shelter.

The agreement is part of a larger plan also approved Jan. 12 to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Santa Clara County. The Council accepted an expenditure plan that allows the city to request a grant for more than \$11 million from the state's Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Plan.

The city has nine locations totaling 790 beds to handle COVID response for the homeless. In District 3, besides the South Hall — the largest facility in the city by far — the city purchased the Sure Stay Hotel on North First Street, adding another 76 beds, and the previously existing Plaza Hotel downtown on San Fernando Street, with 20 beds.

As part of the homeless emergency housing plan, Mayor **Sam Liccardo** and District 3 Councilmember **Raul Peralez** directed city staff to explore the overflow parking area adjacent to the San Jose Police Department along the Guadalupe Parkway as another potential site for temporary interim housing. There may be an opportunity to establish programs where future tenants at that location could assist with Guadalupe River Park cleanup and repair.



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San Jose Downtown Foundation News



Ten more art works by San Jose high school students are featured on downtown's service doors and utility boxes.

Downtown Doors bolsters public landscape: San Jose Downtown Foundation finished 2020 by adding 10 new Downtown Doors art works to downtown San Jose's public art landscape.

Since 2003, art by San Jose-area high school students have been digitized and transferred to vinyl coatings, then attached to downtown service doors and utility boxes. The exhibition of Downtown Doors is refreshed annually and viewed year round.

This latest installation includes photographs, paintings and mixed media, sending messages of diversity, passage of time, uncertain but hopeful futures and the beauty of our planet.

"Despite the challenges of COVID-19, we managed to add 20 Downtown Doors in 2020," said **Ramona Snyder**, Foundation Board President. "This program is our way of welcoming people into downtown's creative environment."

The new works came from a pool of 98 entries submitted before schools were closed due to the pandemic. The artists are **Michaela Sampas** and **Dinhe**

Calamateos-Abarca of Leigh High School, **Madison Sciba** and **Heidi Shin** of Silver Creek High School, **Allison Young** of Santa Teresa High School, **Alex Havner** of Gunderson High School, **Lillian Tran** of Andrew Hill High, **Cindy Ly** of Willow Glen High School, **Selena Huang** of Evergreen Valley High School, and **Sonia Portillo** of Del Mar High School.

Site hosts for the art work include Fairmont Hotel, Philz Coffee, Studio Climbing Gym, Hammer Theatre, Paseo Plaza and utility boxes at Third and Paseo de San Antonio and Plaza de Cesar Chavez and the Paseo.

Thanks to sponsors the City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs, SV Creates and Santa Clara County.

Students receive a \$300 honorarium, a printed certificate, a one-year license to Adobe Creative Cloud programs and a gift package from Insomnia Cookies. Schools receive a \$650 honorarium.

Students are now in process of creating new art for the next round of Downtown Doors. Submissions will be evaluated this spring. Door sponsorships are available, Snyder added.

Museum / cultural center under construction:

Construction has begun on the Little Italy Cultural Center & Museum. Construction involves restoring two properties along West St. John Street near Almaden Avenue. At a Nov. 6 groundbreaking ceremony, officials hoped to complete the project by summer 2021.

The museum aspect includes Italian American historic exhibits, genealogy research area and gift shop. The cultural part of the museum has space reserved for Italian language, music, cooking and arts lessons. The center will have bocce courts, children's "Pinocchio Village" play area and urban garden featuring an exhibit honoring the Valley of Heart's Delight. Check littleitalysj.com.

Obama Boulevard: A 4,300-footlong stretch of Autumn Street, Montgomery Street and Bird Avenue between West St. John Street and Interstate 280 will be renamed Barack Obama Boulevard.

San Jose community members came up with the idea three years ago, collected 3,000 signatures of support, worked with the city to find an appropriate roadway and the City Council approved the street renaming at its Jan. 5 meeting. The north-south artery on downtown's west side includes a portion of Autumn Street next to the SAP Center, Montgomery to San Carlos and Bird to the 280 freeway. Street signs were expected up at the end of January. The street name honors the U.S.'s 44th president and first African American to serve as president.

From the Archives

20 years ago – February 2001 – A 180-page Downtown Strategy Plan by a 33-member Citizen Task Force included ideas such as: three or four levels of parking under St. James Park and Plaza Park; Plaza San Pedro (located where Modera housing is now); intimate event spaces next to the Rep Theatre and Convention Center where the former city library once stood; the addition of one off-peak parking lane along Almaden Boulevard; and a new park along Los Gatos Creek linking existing creek trails to Arena Green and Guadalupe River Park.

25 years ago – February 1996 – Cinequest film-goers were able to get a sneak preview of the brand new \$11 million United Artists Pavilion 8 Cineplex and its glass-enclosed lobby, 71,676 square feet of floor space and more than 3,800 hundred seats.

30 years ago – February 1991 – A "facelift" of St. James Park back to its historic layout took two and a half years to complete. Downtowners were happy to see the chain-link fence around the park come down.

DOWNTOWN DIMENSION

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SJDA Meeting / News

SJDA meeting Feb. 12 on Zoom: SJDA's next public meeting on Zoom will be Feb. 12, starting 8:15 a.m. and features an "exit interview" with Deputy City Manager **Kim Walesh**, in conversation with SJDA Executive Director **Scott Knies**

RSVP through SJDARsvp@sjdowntown.com to receive your link and PIN code to the meeting.

Light the Holiday Nights report: Almost 33,000 people took a socially distant stroll through Plaza de Cesar Chavez to enjoy the Light the Holiday Nights display.

Featuring trees, arches, banners and other festive holiday lighting, the display activated downtown's central park for six weeks between Thanksgiving and the New Year's weekend.

Indeed, the holidays — Dec. 24-25, Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 — were among the busiest days at the park. The top day, however, was Sunday, Dec. 6, when nearly 4,000 people passed through the park after dark.

In additions to the Plaza Park display, downtown also featured lighted projections on buildings around the park and a Story of the Holidays free outdoor audio experiences at 125 S. Market put together by SJDA and 3Below Theaters.

"All the lights safely brightened people's holidays," said **Donna Butcher**, SJDA events coordinator. "It was a success." Sponsors of the Holiday Lights display included Jay Paul Co., Google, Sobrato Organization, Urban Catalyst, Property Based Improvement District and SJDA.