

## Council comeback Andrew Coolidge

After falling short of reelection to a second term on the Chico City Council in 2018, Andrew Coolidge felt no rush to return to civic duty.

"Someone would ask me, and I would say, 'Maybe some day,'" he told the CN&R. "It was something where maybe later in life, maybe in my 50s or 60s, I'd think about trying to run a race to come back to council."

Then 2020 struck. Coolidge, 48, works in public relations, with the bulk of his business centered on bridal shows and home-and-garden shows; coronavirus decimated the events sector. Meanwhile, Chico moved from citywide elections to districts, and he resides in one—District 5—that was set to be contested.

The nexus of opportunity, plus encouragement of supporters, prompted Coolidge to declare his candidacy over the summer, and he went on to beat Lauren Kohler and incumbent Randall Stone, both progressives. Fellow Conservatives, including incumbent Sean Morgan, also won the other three seats to join Kasey Reynolds in a 5-2 majority that flipped the council's power balance.

His colleagues punctuated his comeback by electing Coolidge mayor, with Reynolds vice mayor.

"This is definitely not an easy position," he said, seated in City Council Chambers recently. "I welcome the challenge, but at the same time I realize I'm not going to make everyone happy all the time."

"I'm also going to do it in my style: calm, pragmatic, moving forward at a good pace but welcoming public comment. I've never been one to be aching for the center of attention or limelight—that's not my personality, that's not who I am."

His council leadership now belies his position during his first term, when he periodically found himself on his own outside the conservative bloc (then-Mayor Morgan, Vice Mayor Reanette Fillmer and former Mayor Mark Sorensen).

This time, he came into office aligned with councilmembers supported by the political action committee Citizens for a Safe Chico as well as the similarly oriented citizen groups Chico First and One Chico. The PAC spent around \$220,000 on the election.

Coolidge acknowledged positions he shares with Morgan and the two new councilwomen, Kami Denlay and Deepika Tandon, on issues such as public safety, homelessness and banning syringe service programs. He also pointed to priorities of his that are not promoted by the others—road improvements; tree-planting in



Chico Mayor Andrew Coolidge  
PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Bidwell Park; solar energy; retrofitting more lighting to LED; irrigation and wastewater efficiency.

"PACs speak with a loud megaphone," Coolidge said. "I campaign person to person."

"I have a unique way of looking at city government: It's a little Libertarian, a little conservative and a little socially moderate. Those three things mixed in make me different. I can't necessarily be put into one box."

Coolidge credited the previous council for its budgetary response to the pandemic though feels the city can thaw its hiring freeze, as the new council recently approved for the Chico Police Department.

"My goal, really, is to move the city through things business-wise," he said. "It doesn't have to be controversial. People get their say, the council moves forward in one direction or another."

"City government only moves so quickly, so I don't think necessarily we're going to have rapid change," Coolidge added. "I think we're going to make progress—or at least what I view as progress—in a very methodical, steady pace."

—EVAN TUCHINSKY

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