

Left: Supporters pray with Mark Orme (with tie in center) while awaiting the Chico City Council's decision about his future as city manager at a special meeting March 25.

with the CN&R would not confirm the impetus for the staff upheaval.

The council voted 5-2 to have Ewing negotiate separation terms with Orme. Vice Mayor Kasey Reynolds made the motion, with a second from Councilman Sean Morgan; Councilmen Dale Bennett and Michael O'Brien dissented. Council members unanimously approved the negotiated terms, on a motion made by O'Brien and seconded by Bennett.

The clause in Orme's contract that Ewing cited for entering negotiations states the city manager would remain employed until "Orme resigns in writing following an offer by a majority of the council to accept Orme's resignation in lieu of termination."

Neither Coolidge nor Morgan, a former mayor who's been a councilman since 2012, would establish whether the council instigated Orme's resignation. Coolidge cited confidentiality of personnel matters discussed in closed session; Morgan said "those negotiations could have been going in either direction." Both praised Orme, noting his time as city manager spanned six mayors—seven including his year as assistant city manager under Brian Nakamura.

"I felt it was necessary to accept his resignation," Coolidge said by

phone. "Mark is a very skilled city manager. He's certainly given more to the city in the last nine years than almost anyone I can think of. I have nothing but good things to say about him and wish him nothing but good things for the future."

"Of course, nothing goes perfect in that position, and city manager is a difficult position to hold for a long period of time. I believe the average is something like five years. Chico is often a very charged political environment, so for him to be in that for such a long period of time really shows his fortitude and his willingness to serve the community of Chico."

Said Morgan: "There are people who are like, 'We want somebody's scalp' or 'Finally we got rid of this guy'—it wasn't like that. He's not a bad guy. He's a great guy, he's still a super guy, and whatever he decides to do next, I think he will be fantastic at. He decided to leave; I think about leaving *every single day*, and my job isn't nearly as complicated as his."

### Successor pick

In Madden, the council chose an interim city manager who's been police chief since August 2020 (following a two-month stint as interim chief, succeeding O'Brien) and with the Chico Police Department for 25 years.

Morgan noted that CPD is the largest department in the city "with the most potential liability." He also pointed to the settlement of the Warren v. City of Chico lawsuit, which includes the Pallet shelter site and law enforcement actions; "who's going to be able to get that to the finish line" was a key consideration for him.

Coolidge called the chief "very educated and skilled. I believe he has the leadership to get us through this time. He certainly has the knowledge about city issues and city matters that we need at the helm right now."

Madden moved to a City Hall office that includes Deputy City



Orme concludes his tenure having served under six mayors in nine years.

Manager Jennifer Macarthy. Hired to replace former Assistant City Manager Chris Constantin last April, Macarthy previously served as Butte County's deputy administrative officer for community and economic development; that has been her emphasis at the city.

In consideration for interim city manager, the councilmen mentioned her tenure as well as her role compared to her predecessor's. Constantin was "second in command at all levels," Coolidge said—and while Macarthy is "certainly capable," Morgan said, "as far as running the whole operation for a somewhat extended period of time, that's not what that position [she's holding] has been."

Councilwoman Alex Brown, the progressive among six conservatives, declined to talk about the Orme decision but expressed her concerns about Madden's appointment, for which she cast the one opposing vote. (Morgan made the motion, seconded by O'Brien.)

"There are a variety of capable leaders on the city staff, and I think it sends the wrong message to lead with a law enforcement perspective or narrative," she said by phone Tuesday morning. "That by no means is a judgment on Interim City Manager Madden's capabilities as a leader. But I do believe that many in the community are rattled by that decision ... [which] feeds the narrative that law enforcement in the view of this council is the be-all, end-all of the problems that are facing our city."



Chief of Police Matt Madden moves to the city manager's seat on an interim basis.



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