

## POLITICS: Public weighs in on mayoral succession

By Christine Carrie Fien on November 16, 2010

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The takeaway from Monday night's packed public hearing on mayoral succession is that the debate seems divided by status. Many members of the business, faith, and social service communities pushed for a special election, while many self-identified "regular" citizens said they want an appointment followed by a September 2011 primary.

There are at least two notable exceptions, however, and they make for an odd pairing: former Rochester Mayor Bill Johnson and local attorney John Parrinello both spoke in favor of an appointment and primary.

"When the Supreme Court picked a president, it caused turmoil in this country," Parrinello said. "I don't want that for the City of Rochester."

Those arguing for a special election repeatedly cited stability and continuity. Someone would be elected within 90 days of Mayor Bob Duffy's departure. (Duffy is lieutenant governor-elect and says he will not resign the mayor's office until January 1.) That person would serve through 2013, the remainder of Duffy's term.

An appointed mayor would take office after Duffy steps down, and would likely face a primary in September 2011 and, possibly, a general election challenge that November.

"I've never seen this community in such a state of flux," said Fran Weisberg, who spoke in favor of a special election. Weisberg is executive director of the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency. "We cannot waste time on this. A crisis in leadership is the last thing our city needs right now."

Weisberg and other service providers said that with money tight at every level of government, Rochester needs a fully empowered mayor with the political clout to make sure Rochester gets its fair share of funds from Albany.

A "caretaker" mayor would also have to spend much of his or her time campaigning for the September 2011 primary, said Rochester Business Alliance President Sandy Parker. And a number of projects, including Paetec and MCC's new downtown campus, would be "irrevocably harmed," she said, by the loss of momentum.

But Johnson said those arguments are overblown. Rochester is unusual, he said, in that it has had only five mayors in the last 46 years. Other cities have experienced much more turnover, he said, and "they managed to survive change."

As far as continuity goes, Johnson said, there's no guarantee that the next mayor will follow the path set by Duffy. He or she may have a brand-new agenda.

Johnson and others said that the mayor should be chosen by the citizenry, and not by "a handful of people behind closed doors." (The Democratic candidate in a special election would be selected by party leaders.)

"We must trust the people of this community to do the right thing," Johnson said.

Maplewood resident Beth Olivares said an appointment is actually the choice that promotes the most stability, because the appointee would step right into the office. And a special election, she said, would be expensive and disruptive.

Council President Lovely Warren has said that Council will decide on either a special election or appointment sometime next month. Warren is on record supporting a special election.