

Thomas Richards will run for mayor if special election held

Jeffrey Blackwell and Gary McLendon • Staff writers • December 3, 2010

Rochester Deputy Mayor Thomas Richards said Thursday that he will not accept an appointment to be city mayor, but will run for the office if City Council decides to hold a special election in the spring.

City Council is debating how to fill the office of mayor when Mayor Robert Duffy leaves at the end of the year to become New York's lieutenant governor. Council can call for a special election to fill the remaining three years of Duffy's term or appoint a temporary mayor to serve until a general election in November of next year.

"I thought long and hard about this, and I think I have the experience in city government recently and today to be in a good position to know and believe that the decision needs to be made sooner and we need to get going," Richards said, by way of explaining why he supports a special election but not an appointment to mayor.

"Mayor Duffy has brought us to this point as mayor and what I want to do, as I have stood beside him since day one, is to finish what he set out to do in his second term," he said.

In response to Richards' announcement, Duffy said Thursday that Richards has "done an extraordinary job as our corporation counsel," but he will not endorse any candidate for mayor at this time.

"I will endorse a candidate when the time comes, and that time will come in the future," Duffy said.

Duffy also said he will not weigh in on whether his successor should be appointed or voted in via a special election.

"It would be inappropriate for me to speak publicly (on) what should happen next with the process," Duffy said. "I have great confidence in President Lovely Warren of the City Council. They are going to be going through the process of what to do next.

Tom (Richards) is the first and the only candidate so far to announce. I'm not sure who else may come in, but on a personal and professional level, I certainly think the world of this guy."

Richards, 67, is a favorite of Democratic Party leadership and the business community. At a news conference Thursday morning at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial, he was introduced by state Assemblyman Joseph Morelle of Irondequoit, chairman of the Monroe County Democratic Committee, who has publicly urged Richards to run.

"This is a great day for Rochester and all of Monroe County," Morelle said. "This is one of those rare moments when we have the opportunity for both change and continuity — the arrival of a new leader who has nonetheless already proven his merit beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Along with Morelle, scores of backers were in attendance. Assemblyman David Gantt, D-Rochester, dean of the city delegation to Albany, was in the crowd as was Sandy Parker, president and chief executive of the Rochester Business Alliance.

"I think this is the right thing to do, that's why I support him," said Gantt. "I don't think there is anybody else left at this time who can continue what we need."

Richards said that because of the economic situations in the region, state and nation, Rochester cannot afford to wait for leadership to move forward on initiatives and projects such as redevelopment of Midtown Plaza. He also said that the city will have

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even more challenging **budget** problems in the next year.

"Our **future**, though, is not just about projects or buildings or tough budgets," he said. "It's important to remember that it's about people and neighborhoods, about public safety, education and economic development. It's about the quality of our life."

City Council **plans** to decide in the next couple of weeks whether to schedule a special election in the spring to elect the city's next mayor, or appoint someone to the position and wait for the regular primary and general election cycle in the fall.

Richards, who served as the city's **corporation** counsel under Duffy until the recent move to deputy mayor, has reached out to members of City Council, community and business leaders and the leadership of the Democratic Party.

Warren is a strong proponent of a special election. Councilwoman Carolee Conklin recently said that she also is in favor of a special election. Others are undecided. City Councilman Matt Haag recently said he was favoring a special election but was still undecided because of concerns that the shortened process might not produce the strongest candidate.

There is a growing chorus of opposition to a special election. On Tuesday, leaders of the city's Working Families Party held a news conference outside City Hall to voice their protests against a special election — adding their voice to labor and Democratic Party neighborhood leaders.

On Thursday, Parker said Richards is the strong candidate that city needs to move forward. She urged City Council to call for a special election.

"This is the best news this morning," she said. "This city is in a state where we have a lot of unfinished business, and we have an individual here who can wrap up some of the details and he will also bring a continuity to City Hall to keep in place some of the many terrific people that Bob Duffy brought into his administration and who I think will stay under a Richardson administration."

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