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Newly minted councilman eyes changes

By Jason Kandel, Staff Writer
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BURBANK - Optometrist David Gordon's interest in city politics was sparked in 1988 shortly after he bought office space for his new practice on Hollywood Way. A passer-by told him the city planned to widen the street out front and take away parking.

Seeing it as a threat to his livelihood, Gordon got together a group of residents, took on City Hall and won, he said.

"I didn't even know where City Hall was in 1988," said Gordon, Burbank's newest City Council member who edged out former Burbank Mayor Bill Wiggins in a tight race in Tuesday's special election.

Filling the seat left vacant by former Councilwoman Stacey Murphy - who resigned after being arrested on drug and child endangerment charges - Gordon won 4,253 votes over Wiggins' 3,996 in the all-mail-in election. More than 11,212 ballots were returned, out of nearly 47,000 eligible Burbank voters.

Three other candidates rounded out the ballot - Vahe Hovanessian, 31, had 1,068 votes; Amy Lawrence, 48, had 1,043 votes; and Michael Dontanville, 42, had 852 votes.

Fresh off his victory, Gordon, 50, talked about his race and the big issues he hopes to take up after his expected swearing-in ceremony at the Feb. 14 City Council meeting.

"I really think ... this is a victory for the people in the community," said the 6-foot-6-inch Long Island native. "I think it's extremely important that there be diversity on the council, that different viewpoints are discussed, and that the people feel that their questions and concerns will be listened to and acted upon in an appropriate and expeditious manner."

Burbank Assistant City Manager Mike Flad said he and others expected the election to be close, and it turned out to be one of the closest margins that he and colleagues can recall.

"Everyone in the community was commenting about how Dr. Gordon truly ran a strong campaign," he said. "He was very visible. People who helped with his campaign were visible. He had the lawn signs out there. He had a presence at grocery stores. He had a presence at the council meetings."

And, Flad said, he had a clear message - reducing traffic and preventing airport expansion.

Gordon said one of the main reasons he ran was to "restore trust" in City Hall after the arrest last year of Murphy on drug and child endangerment charges. She pleaded guilty to the charges in December.

If the day after the election was any indication, Gordon said, he believes residents are pleased. He's received letters, e-mails and calls of congratulations from friends and future colleagues. Mayor Jef Vander Borgh, who voted for Wiggins, gave Gordon a hearty handshake after results were broadcast at City Hall on Tuesday night.

"At the end of the day, he is the person elected, and I will work with him," Vander Borgh said. "He ran a campaign that said that there was a lack of credibility on the council, and I am one of them. So, to that extent, I'm not happy. But he will be one of them as well. It's very easy on the outside to claim the moral ground, but sometimes it's not as clear - the options are gray, they're not black and white."

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