

Battle of the liberals in District 5

No incumbent, but leaders begin to emerge

By **Sonia Mansfield**

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

Without an incumbent supervisor running for re-election, the District 5 supervisorial race was wide open, but now — with the election two weeks away — three frontrunners have emerged.

School board member Juanita Owens, deputy public defender Matt Gonzalez, and former chairman of the San Francisco Democratic Party Agar Jaicks are leading the pack of 11 candidates running for supervisor in one of the most progressive districts in one of the most liberal cities in the country.

District 5 is the most oddly shaped district in the city. It runs from California Street in the north to 17th Street in the south, and from Laguna Street in the east to 19th Avenue in the west. It also includes a thin strip of the Inner Sunset district as its westernmost border. District 5 is segmented into five major neighborhoods — Western Addition, Lower Haight, Haight/Panhandle, Cole Valley and the Inner Sunset.

Within the borders of the peculiarly shaped district are such landmarks as Japantown, Alamo Square Park, and one of the most well-known neighborhoods

in the country — the intersection of Haight and Ashbury, which was ground zero for the hippie movement of the 1960s.

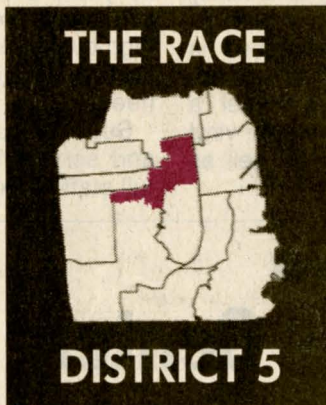
According to the David Binder Research polling firm, 55 percent of the overall population of District 5 is white, higher than the citywide average of 47 percent. African Americans make up the next-largest racial category at 24 percent of the district's residents.

Of the city's 11 districts, District 5 has the highest proportion of voters under the age of 40, but one of the lowest voter turnouts. One of the most progressive city districts, District 5's voters are likely to support Democrat and third-party candidates. A higher proportion of District 5 voters call themselves liberals than in any other district, according to Binder.

Just how liberal the candidates actually

are is going to come into play in the election, say neighborhood activists. James Beck, vice president of the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Coalition, noted that the district supported Board of Supervisors president Tom Ammiano in his mayoral bid against Mayor Willie Brown, and said that candidates will have to be specific in their positions on district issues such as affordable housing, gentrification, and homelessness.

"The candidates need to have an independent and detailed



ELECTION: Leaders emerge

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prescription for alleviating those issues," said Beck. "They will need to articulate whether they think something like gentrification is a good thing or problematic, and why."

Jan Bolassi from the Western Addition Neighborhood Association said that the boundaries of District 5 encompass a majority of the city's social-services centers, and candidates will have to address that. Bolassi said that district residents feel their community is overburdened with more than its fair share of social services.

"We have the highest amount of social services in the city — way more than half. And that's a question for the candidates: How do you plan to equalize it?" said Bolassi.

Richard Wada, a member of the Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force, said that a majority of the candidates have overlooked the issues in Japantown and are instead focusing their campaigns in the Haight neighborhood, which has more politically active neighborhood groups.

"The issues facing the Haight are much different than the issues facing Japantown and the Western Addition," said Wada. "We're a forgotten community to many of [the candidates]."

Along with the economic development and preservation of Japantown, Wada said, Japantown residents and merchants are concerned about the closure of Japantown Bowl. The building that housed the bowling alley was recently sold, and neighbors are concerned that it will be used as office space.

Wada said Japantown merchants worry that Japantown Bowl is just the beginning, and soon they, too, will be pushed out in favor of businesses that can pay higher rents.

"The closure of Japantown Bowl is going to have a ripple effect in Japantown," Wada predicted.

Supervisor frontrunners

Gonzalez, who ran for district attorney last year but finished third in a field of five candidates, said that he is aware that there are issues that differ from neighborhood to neighborhood in District 5.

Gonzalez, who moved into the Western Addition at the end of last year, said that because each neighborhood faces different issues, he doesn't want to focus on any single problem in his campaign.

"The issues really change from one neighborhood to another," said Gonzalez, a senior trial attorney at the Public Defender's Office. "If I said, 'It's all about housing,' it sounds like I'm picking one thing over another."

Gonzalez said that one thing he does plan to focus on if elected supervisor is the city's Planning Commission. Noting the recent removal by the mayor of planning commissioner Dennis Antenore, Gonzalez said it is time for a change. He said that commissioners should be able to make decisions on planning matters without fear of the mayor removing them from the panel.

"There's an incredible defect in how planning commissioners are appointed and removed," said Gonzalez. "Whether I win or lose, I'm interested in getting a measure on the ballot [that changes the appointment and removal process]."

In the most progressive district in San Francisco, it doesn't hurt Gonzalez that he has scored Ammiano's endorsement. However, Gonzalez said that the word "progressive" has been thrown around a lot in the District 5 campaign, and that he needs to distinguish himself from the other candidates.

"Even candidates with Willie Brown's support are using that word. Virtually everyone is liberal or progressive," said Gonzalez. "So when I talk about the issues, I try to go to the second level of disclosure of how to do things."

Jaicks, who said he has lived in the district for more than 40 years, said he will use his experience as a television director, producer, and writer and as a human rights commissioner to tackle the issues such as affordable housing, traffic, homelessness, and crime, not only in District 5 but throughout the city.

One issue that is prevalent in District 5, and the entire city as well, is homelessness. Jaicks said that part of the problem is that the agencies set up to help the homeless are not accountable for their actions.

"I would advocate for a homeless commission and a homeless budget. [The commission] would distribute funding and hold those agencies accountable," said Jaicks.

Jaicks said he also supports transit-first policies, such as increasing the number of bike paths and making Muni run more efficiently.

"The idea is to keep improving Muni — make it more abundant, clean, efficient. It would be easier to persuade people to get out of their cars and onto Muni," said Jaicks.

Jaicks has received the endorsement of Supervisor Sue Bierman, who cannot run for reelection in District 5 due to term limits. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and Mayor Willie Brown have also endorsed him. Jaicks said that like his fellow candidates, he is a progressive. The difference, he said, is that he won't be afraid to exercise his independent voice on the board.

"I doubt there's another candidate that can match my progressive record," said Jaicks. "I think I'm more independent than the other candidates. I'm indebted to none of [my endorsers]. I'm not going to run for higher office, so I won't be looking over my shoulder and I will be able to vote with a greater freedom than the other candidates."

Owens, a dean of counseling at City College, former chairwoman of the Commission on the Status of Women, and a former police commissioner, is the only woman running for supervisor in District 5.

As a member of the San Francisco school board, Owens has overseen drastic budget cuts in the school district, including approximately \$12 million last year, \$9 million this year, and \$14 million that will have to be cut next year.

Owens' campaign literature states that she intends to fight bribery and corruption at City Hall. Owens has received the endorsement of the mayor and the Alice B. Toklas Lesbian/Gay Democratic Club.

Owens did not return repeated phone calls made by the *Independent*. However, in a debate sponsored by the League of Women Voters, held September 27 at Sheridan Elementary School, Owens said she stands by her record of community service.

"I have demonstrated in my 15 years of public service that I can get the job done," said Owens, whose campaign slogan is "Real results, not rhetoric."

Other candidates

Also running for supervisor in District 5 is Joe Konopka, founder of the neighborhood organization RAD and vice-chairman of the Haight-Ashbury Democratic Club. Konopka said he is focusing on homelessness, neighborhood preservation, and improving Muni, but he said affordable housing is the top issue in the city.

Konopka, who has lived in the district for 13 years, also said he is for a City Hall that is more user-friendly and a more-responsive Planning Commission that actually listens to the community.

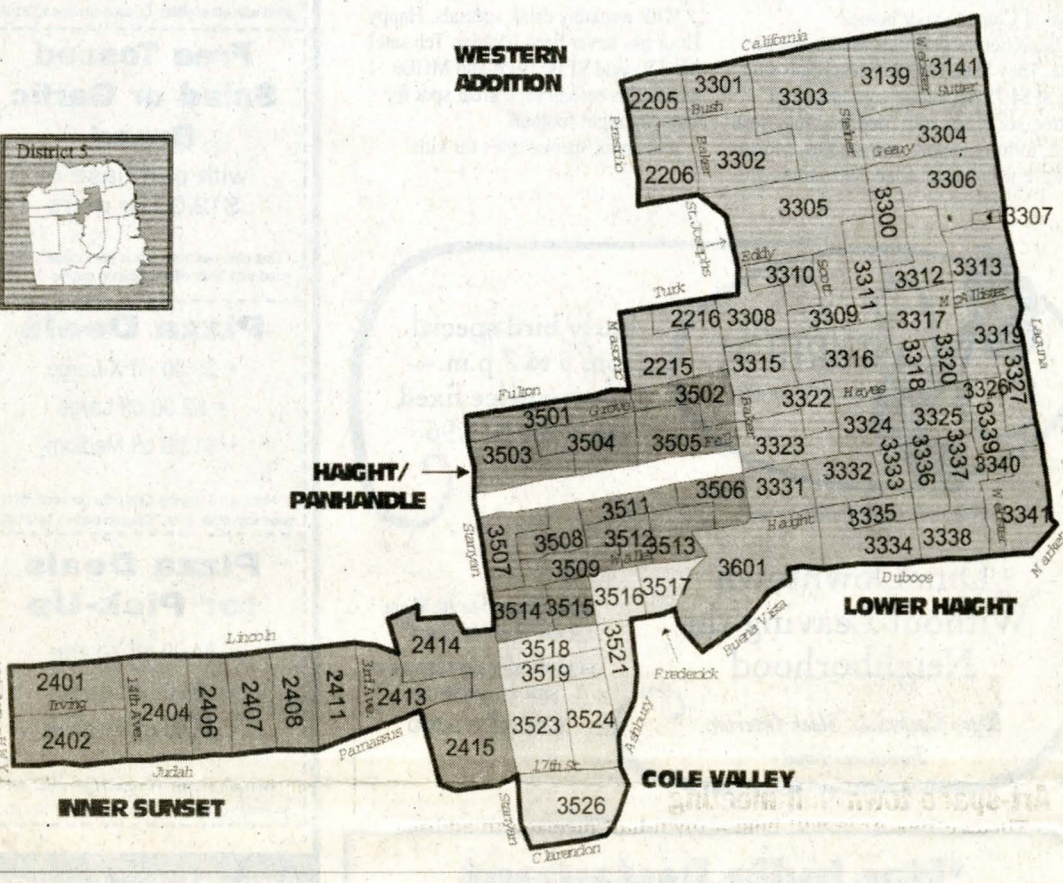
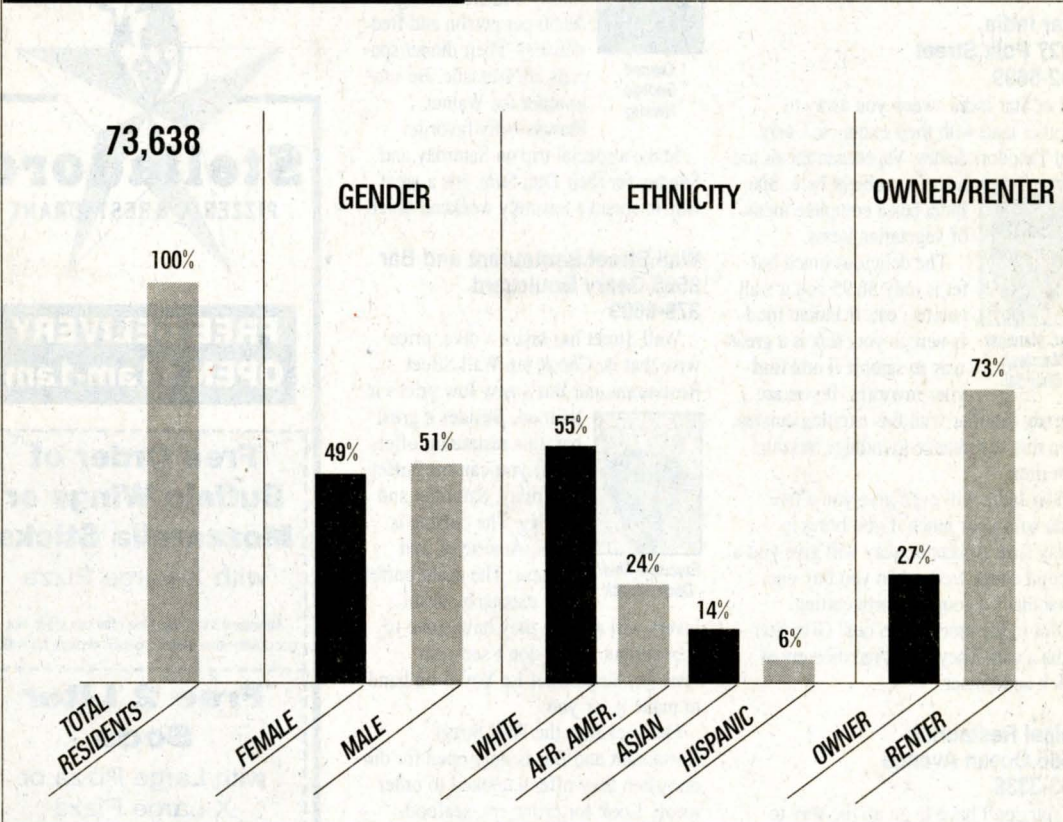
"The Planning Commission is appointed by the mayor and funded by big development. Downtown doesn't pay any attention to the neighborhoods," said Konopka.

Jay Bagi, a chef for the Fairmont and Donatello hotels, said he is tired of the lack of responsiveness and accountability at City Hall and is focusing his campaign on affordable housing and homeless issues. Those are the issues that "supervisors are supposed to look at," said Bagi, a 13-year resident of District 5.

A five-year resident of District

DISTRICT 5 PROFILE

WESTERN ADDITION, LOWER HAIGHT, HAIGHT/PANHANDLE, COLE VALLEY, INNER SUNSET



Source: District Elections Guidebook — Charting San Francisco's New Political Landscape, David Binder Research

5, Green Party candidate Rob Anderson said he is focusing on the homeless problem in the city. "We need a real serious count [of the homeless] and allocate the resources to deal with it," said Anderson. "That could be creating more housing, [single-room-occupancy hotels], or shelters."

He also said that by running for supervisor he is providing the voters of the district "a progressive alternative to the Democratic ruling party."

Demian Barrett, a financial

broker who has lived in the district for three years, said that along with coming up with innovative solutions for the city's homeless problem and making Muni run more efficiently, he also wants to take politics out of the city's housing crisis.

"I think we should change the attitude of the city to make it more conducive to families," said Barrett.

A photographer and teacher at City College, Holman Turner said he is most concerned about

crime in the district and the city as a whole. Turner, who has lived in the district for five years, said it is important for supervisors to find solutions for preventing violence.

Also on the ballot for supervisor are public-relations consultant Nicholas Gaffney; John Palmer; and former supervisor, sheriff, and chief of police Richard Hongisto. Gaffney, Palmer, and Hongisto did not return phone calls from the *Independent*.