

2 incumbents and 23-year-old challenger win Walnut City Council seats

SAN
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By [Steve Scauzillo](#)

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Walnut City Council candidates, from top left, Eric Ching, Bella Cristobal, Dino Pollalis, Andrew E. Rodriguez, Betty Tang and Nancy Renne Tragarz.

WALNUT >> Twenty-three year-old challenger Andrew Rodriguez, along with incumbents Nancy Tragarz and Eric Ching, were elected to the City Council Tuesday night.

While the victory by the two incumbents was more or less expected, the taking of the open seat vacated by Tony Cartagena by Rodriguez, a political newcomer, was surprising.

Rodriguez, who earned his bachelor's degree in public policy and political science from Rutgers University last year, said he was confident he would win.

“We’ve run a great campaign. We kept it positive. And I knocked on a lot of doors,” Rodriguez said Tuesday night shortly after the final numbers came across his computer, setting off loud cheering.

“I did. I really did,” he said, still waiting for the victory to sink in. “I am humbled and am looking forward to serving,” he said.

Unofficial results showed Tragarz as the top vote-getter with 2,358 votes, Ching had 1,896 votes and Rodriguez captured 1,668 votes. The three join Mayor Robert Pacheco and Mayor Pro-tem Mary Su on the five-member City Council.

The other three candidates were: Bella Cristobal, 66, who came in fourth with 1,281 votes; Dino Pollalis, 53, with 1,170 votes and Betty Tang, 49, who finished last with 1,064 votes.

Ching said voters recognized the contributions to the community from himself and Tragarz.

“The service I’ve put in speaks volumes,” he said Tuesday night. “I will have to continue that.” He wants to work on crafting a new city general plan and providing careful planning for a future development coming to a lot adjacent to the Walnut Sheriff’s Station.

Since the 2014 election, several issues have arisen in this bedroom community tucked into the northeast corner of Los Angeles County.

A group called [United Walnut Taxpayers](#) formed in opposition to plans to build a five-story parking garage at neighboring Mt. San Antonio College across the street from the Timberline neighborhood. The group later opposed an [11-acre solar farm](#) proposed by Mt. SAC to be erected on a prominent city hillside.

The group filed a lawsuit saying the college was misusing bond money for projects not classroom-related. The city also filed a lawsuit, claiming the college must get a conditional use permit and follow zoning ordinances. Though nothing has been decided in either suit, the effect of the legal actions has been [a total collapse of relations between City Hall and the college](#), which is entirely in Walnut, spread over 411 acres and with an overall student population of close to 60,000.

Cristobal and Rodriguez each accepted campaign donations from individual members of the Mt. SAC Board of Trustees but later returned the money.

Cristobal gave back \$1,000 from Trustee David Hall, who at one meeting called the residents out for whining about any type of development. She said she didn’t think the money constituted a conflict of interest, but she returned it anyway “to appease everyone who may have doubts in their minds.”

[Money and political action committees](#) — independent expenditure groups — are part of the small city’s expensive election cycle this year. Three political action committees were active in supporting or opposing candidates. Truth & Dignity Municipal Leadership PAC spent \$1,313.12

on a political mailer in support of challenger Betty Tang. Two other committees formed this year to oppose Tang: Citizens to Protect Walnut Committee and Citizens for Family Values to Oppose Betty Tang for Walnut City Council 2016.

The Family Values PAC raised a total of \$5,048 this year, with expenditures mostly on political mailers. That included \$2,236.81 for one English mailer and one in Chinese. The mailers were produced by Chinese American Advertising & Direct Mail LLC in Monterey Park and funneled through the U.S. Post Office on Lemon Avenue in Walnut, according to campaign documents filed with the city clerk's office.

Walnut is a city of about 30,000 people located south of the San Jose Hills and between the 10, 57 and 60 freeways. Its population is about 63.6 percent Asian, 23.7 percent white, 12.5 percent Hispanic and 2.8 percent African American.

The city has a median household income of \$102,093, according to the 2010 Census.