

Without election quorum, homes association board members keep seats

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A second contested Palos Verdes Homes Associations election in two years ended this week without a quorum of voters, keeping the current board members in their positions for another year.

Roughly 70 people turned out for Tuesday's annual meeting, the final stop in what became a con-

tentious election that pitted three challengers against five incumbent board members. Ultimately, only 1,589 votes were cast, 1,122 short of the 2,711 needed for a quorum of voters.

Shortly after he announced that a quorum hadn't been reached, Phil Frengs, president of the PVHA board, encouraged the assembled homeowners to put what had become a tense election behind them.

"I personally think that there's some fatigue in our community over this continued debate," Frengs said. "I'm hoping we can put the contention behind us and enjoy the special privilege that it is to live in our community."

Without a quorum of voters, the association won't open or tally any of the ballots. Instead, the envelopes were counted and verified by retired Superior Court Judge Michael Latin and the incum-

bent members were reappointed to their positions.

Some, like resident Paul McCabe, questioned how democratic that process is.

"It's very, very disheartening to me to watch this process because it seems very, very undemocratic," McCabe said to the board. "It just feels like you are not open, and I've never seen that on a nonprofit board before."

Association

FROM PAGE 1

Past problems

The annual election hit an early snafu this year after an incorrect address was printed on return envelopes distributed with the association's ballots. Instead of the address for Moss Adams, the Los Angeles accounting firm hired by the PVHA to collect and count the ballots, the envelopes were printed with the address to Sparky's pet grooming, a business down the street from the firm.

Those problems came

on the heels of another issue-laden election in 2016, when ultimately three ballots were floating among association members. Eventually, Residents for Open Board Elections, a group of local residents critical of the current PVHA board, challenged the methods for counting the votes and the board's decision to keep incumbent members in place.

ROBE, launched in the aftermath of some residents' dissatisfaction over a 2012 decision by the PVHA and city of Palos Verdes Estates to swap land with a couple living on Via Panorama, has remained critical of other de-

isions by the association's board in subsequent years.

The association, which oversees deed restrictions and architectural requirements in the affluent community, took measures this year to prevent those same accusations, including hiring Moss Adams and accepting ballots by mail only, a change designed to eliminate the confusion of the 2016 election when residents submitted their votes multiple times by different methods.

Resident concerns

Residents during the meeting raised concerns that flaws in the election process may have pre-

vented some from casting votes.

"What I would call glitches that popped up ... made people feel insecure about the election," said Marleene Breene, a ROBE candidate. "It may or may not have been enough to sway people one way or the other, but the fact that the process was not working smoothly, I think, is an indication that things need to be done a little differently."

Breene and other homeowners relayed stories of some members never receiving their ballots, or concerns that, without a way to track their return envelopes, some felt their

votes may never have made it to Moss Adams.

PVHA manager Kim Robinson, however, disputed that characterization. She was disappointed, she said, that a quorum wasn't reached, but added that overall the election ran smoothly.

She countered some of the claims that an incorrect address printed on return envelopes distributed with the ballots had an impact on the vote count. Robinson sent four envelopes, she said, some with the incorrect address, one with a corrected address and another with the address blocked (but with a barcode intact) com-

pletely, and all four eventually made their way to Moss Adams.

Some residents raised the possibility of lowering the threshold for the quorum to allow for an election even if less than 50 percent of the association's residents cast a ballot. Robinson countered that argument as well.

"I think the quorum was set high by the founding fathers for a reason, and it was to prevent wholesale changes in the board," she said. "All I know is that we ran a very neat and very clean election and we had two professionals managing it and, overall, I think it was good."