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Election is months away, but city candidates stepping out now

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Municipal candidates in 244 cities and towns have from Monday to June 8 to file for a place on the ballot, and, in Salt Lake City, this year's election is likely to bring big changes to City Hall.

Two dynamic capital city council members, Kyle LaMalfa from District 2 and Luke Garrott from District 4, will not return in January. Both men have played prominent roles in guiding city government. LaMalfa is stepping down because he is moving out of the district. Garrott, currently council chairman, has announced his intention to run for mayor.

The District 6 seat also will be on the ballot. Incumbent Councilman Charlie Luke said he will seek re-election.

Aug. 11 is slated as the primary election date to winnow races with more than two candidates leading up to the Nov. 3 election.

Utah's capital is unique in the state in that its 190,000 population almost doubles during weekday business hours, adding transportation and maintenance burdens to resident taxpayers.

That fact has always played a big role in Salt Lake City politics, particularly regarding tax policy.



Al Hartmann | Tribune file photo

The election is months away but the campaign season is about to start with candidate filings from Monday through June 8. More than 240 cities and towns will hold municipal elections, although Salt Lake City and Ogden are the only big cities with mayoral contests.

Already, the mayor's race has produced headlines with state Sen. Jim Dabakis, D-Salt Lake City, jumping in and immediately vaulting out. Among his complaints was a potential sales-tax increase sought by Mayor Ralph Becker.

Throughout the spring season, the mayor's opponents, Garrott and former state Rep. Jackie Biskupski, also have been calling him to task on a variety of issues. With these high-profile challengers, the contest promises to be a far feistier affair than four years ago.

But the popular two-term mayor has amassed a large campaign fund and continues to use his office to political advantage by staging regular news conferences on city projects large and small.

Odgen is the only other large Utah city scheduled to hold a mayoral election this year. Mayor Mike Caldwell has said he will seek a second term.

No matter what the outcome of the Salt Lake City mayor's race, the complexion of local government will change at the other end of City Hall.

So far, the contest for LaMalfa's seat, representing the west-side communities of Poplar Grove and Glendale, looks to be the tamest of the four races.

As of Friday, only two candidates in District 2 had filed papers necessary to raise campaign funds. According to those records, Andrew Johnston and former City Councilman Van Turner appear poised to jump in. But the field may grow by the close of the filing window.

By contrast, in District 4, six candidates have filed to raise funds in what should produce a lively political scrum leading up to the primary. Babs DeLay, Carol A. Good, Derek Kitchen, Miles Petty, Nathan Salazar and Jennifer "Jen" Colby all have filed campaign fundraising papers.

That district stretches from the Rio Grande neighborhood around Pioneer Park to the University of Utah and is often the focal point of public safety, transportation and homeless issues.

In District 6, Tracey Harty said she is ready to challenge Luke for his District 6 seat. And former Councilman J.T. Martin looks poised to do the same, although he has yet to confirm that he is running. If all three get in the race it will be a rematch of four years ago.

The area that encompasses the Yalecrest neighborhood and surrounding area has been at the center of the debate over local historic districts — the preservation of neighborhood character versus private-property rights.

Crime and transportation also have become hot topics in that east-bench area.

Council seats for Districts 1, 3, 5 and 7 aren't up for grabs until 2017.

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