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# Hispanic community leader Luna picked to fill Mesa Council vacancy



David Luna said he was "extremely surprised" by the council's decision.

Mark Henle/Republic file photo

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**About David Luna**  
**Hometown:** Douglas.  
**Age:** 57.  
**Family:** Wife Hilda; two daughters; two grandchildren.  
**Occupation:** Director of educational television, Mesa Public Schools; adjunct faculty, Mesa Community College communications department.  
**Education:** BA, University of Arizona; masters degree in mass communication, Arizona State University; doctorate in educational leadership, Northern Arizona University.  
**Community activities:** Service on numerous education and community boards, including Friends of the Mesa Arts Center, Mesa United Way, A New Leaf, Mesa Association of Hispanic Citizens and Mesa Counts on College. Luna has won numerous awards, including Mesa Man of the Year in 2012.

By Maria Polletta  
The Republic | azcentral.com  
Thu Sep 12, 2013 12:52 PM

After the "gut-wrenching" process of whittling 17 qualified candidates down to one, the Mesa City Council has selected broadcast professional, teacher and Latino-community advocate David Luna to replace former Councilwoman Dina Higgins in northeast Mesa.

Higgins resigned from the District 5 seat last month to devote more time to her job as a business development manager with Servern Trent Services, a global water-treatment company.

The council interviewed its final four — Arizona School Administrators executive director Debra Duvall, Arizona Bar Foundation CEO Kevin Ruegg, retired school psychologist Kathleen Rahn and Luna — Sept. 5. Each came brandishing a resume detailing decades of community service.

"This has been both an extremely rewarding and a very, very frustrating process, I think, for all of us," Mesa Mayor Scott Smith said at a special council session Sept. 12. "It's frustrating in the sense that we don't have one single person who absolutely ran away from the pack, because all four of you are incredible, and that's not just nice talk."

"We literally could've gone in any direction and I think felt comfortable," Smith said. "Unfortunately, we only have one seat."

Vice Mayor Alex Finter and Councilmen Dennis Kavanaugh, Christopher Glover and Scott Somers cited Luna's community activism, non-profit involvement, focus on diversity and willingness to work through hot-button issues as reasons for their pick.

"When I first left the city as a fire captain and wanted to have some community involvement, I served on the Human Relations Advisory

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Board with Mr. Luna,” Finter said. “That was a very controversial time — lots of trouble, lots of things to deal with — and we really hashed out difficult issues, and I learned...about being able to have diverse opinions and spirited discussion.”

Kavanaugh said he “support(ed) the recommendation 100 percent,” welcoming Luna to “the fun world of having patience, a sense of humor and a thick skin.”

Somers pointed out that Luna earlier this year had been selected as Mesa’s Man of the Year and asked, “If the citizens of Mesa feel that you are one of their two top citizens this year, how can we do any better?”

Glover said he thought Luna would both “be able to represent the district and...do that outreach to the community as well.” He joked that some of the finalists had been serving the community “even longer than I’ve been alive,” and urged the three finalists who weren’t chosen to continue along that path.

Luna, who said he hadn’t considered running for a council seat until friends encouraged him to pursue the unexpected opening, said he was “extremely surprised” by the council’s decision.

The 57-year-old’s first goal will be to learn city procedures and “what it takes to be a councilperson,” he said. He planned to meet with City Manager Chris Brady within the week to go over details.

“Once I have a better understanding of the issues in detail and what’s going on in District 5, then I’ll begin to tackle those,” he said.

In discussing his strengths, Luna credited his extensive non-profit experience with preparing him to be a “good fiscal steward” as the city continues its gradual economic recovery.

“I work with a number of nonprofits that have limited resources. So what do you do? You try and work together and come up with the best solution,” he said.

He also believes his being “very entrenched in the Latino community” will help him “move those issues forward.” But he stressed that he wants all types of minority voices in Mesa to be heard.

“There’s a propensity to look at a community and say, ‘OK, there’s a large Hispanic population,’” he said. “But we are a diverse community. There are many, many diverse groups within the city of Mesa.”

Two other immediate challenges Luna identified were the city’s light-rail expansion and blight.

“I love this community, and I’ve been here for 25 years,” he said. “What a great opportunity to serve.”

The city will hold a formal swearing-in ceremony Sept. 23, Smith said. Luna will serve until January 2015.

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