

## Chowchilla council chooses new mayor

By Thaddeus Miller  
tmiller@mercedsunstar.com

With a fair amount of shuffling going on at City Hall in Chowchilla, the City Council voted to make another change – this time for the mayoral seat.

With a 3-2 vote, the council picked John Chavez to be mayor for the next year. In Chowchilla, the mayor is not selected by a citywide vote; rather, the council appoints its leader.

This month, the city also added two council members, an interim police chief and interim city administrator.

The previous mayor, Councilman Richard Walker and Councilwoman Mary Trinket Gaumnitz cast the “no” votes.

Chavez, 48, is in his second term on the City Council. He said the council works best when operating as a team. “I see the mayor’s role as controlling meetings and everything, but when it comes down to making a decision, you still only have one vote,” he said.

With Chowchilla still looking for a full-time city administrator and police chief, the role of the mayor could be elevated as the city goes into 2015. “We’ve still got to make sure everything is run correctly,” he said.

As with other Valley cities, Chavez said, Chowchilla’s biggest challenge is growth. The city needs to attract business and industry, he said.

Chowchilla, a city of more than 17,000, has an unemployment rate of 10.2 percent, according to the latest numbers from the Economic Development Department. That’s higher than the Madera County and state averages.

“We have to go out and find people, get them interested in Chowchilla, plant some seeds,” because new projects take time to develop, he said.

A native of Atwater, Chavez works at the Save Mart bakery and deli in town.

Chavez nominated Waseem Ahmed, who was sworn in as a City Council member this month, to serve as mayor pro-tem. The businessman’s appointment was approved in a 4-1 vote. Richard Walker cast the no vote.

Ahmed served 12 years on the city’s Planning Commission and has been on the Chowchilla Industry Development board and the Madera County Task Force on High Speed Rail, a project he said he opposes.

Sun-Star staff writer Thaddeus Miller can be reached at [\(209\) 385-2453](tel:2093852453) or [tmiller@mercedsunstar.com](mailto:tmiller@mercedsunstar.com).