

Supervisors ratify new Fresno County administrative officer

By Marc Benjamin
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Jean Rousseau was officially appointed by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday as Fresno County's new chief administrative officer.

Rousseau, Tulare County's administrative officer since 2007, starts his new position Oct. 26, replacing John Navarrette. The vote was 4-1 and took less than four minutes of discussion.

Rousseau, 53, will earn \$220,000 annually, slightly more than Navarrette's current salary.

On Monday, supervisors were delivered documents about the care of Rousseau's mother, which he has overseen with his brother and sister. Because family members couldn't agree on her care, they had their mother's case put under the Fresno County conservator.

During court hearings, questions arose about late payments for bills for Rousseau's mother, and care provider and documents indicate an Adult Protective Services investigation was opened. County officials would not confirm or deny whether the investigation is ongoing.

Supervisors were supposed to approve Rousseau's appointment during the morning session, but waited until an afternoon closed session to affirm him in case there was extended discussion.

Supervisor Buddy Mendes said the late information had no bearing on the board's decision.

Supervisor Andreas Borgeas said he was glad Rousseau was joining the county.

"We are very excited that you've decided to make Fresno County, in your position as CAO, your home," said Borgeas.

I look forward to coming on board and making a difference.

Jean Rousseau, Fresno County's future CAO

Supervisor Henry R. Perea cast the lone dissenting vote.

"There were issues brought to our board's attention that gave me reason to pause," Perea said. "The decision has been made to select and now it's time to move forward."

Rousseau was thankful in his brief statement to supervisors.

"I know I have big shoes to fill," he said. "I have a lot of respect for Mr. Navarrette as do his counterparts throughout the state, and I look forward to coming on board and making a difference."

To make the occasion official, Navarrette placed a Fresno County lapel pin on Rousseau's suit jacket.

Rousseau previously worked in Tulare County as assistant county administrative officer and as chief deputy county administrative officer of finance between 2004 and 2006. Rousseau is a certified public accountant with more than 25 years experience.

Before working in Tulare County, he was employed for 15 years by the Fresno County's Auditor-Controller/Treasurer-

Tax Collector's office. He also had served as a staff accountant in private practice at Sampson & Sampson CPAs in Clovis.

The supervisors also bid farewell to Navarrette, who presided over his final meeting.

"I think you've done a great job for Fresno County making sure the ship was headed in the right direction, especially when we hit our rough waters the last few years," Perea said.

I'm very happy to have served as long as I have.

John Navarrette, Fresno County's retiring CAO

Borgeas thanked Perea for balancing the varied interests of the supervisors.

"The CAO has to balance out overseeing all the departments and five cats on the board, and we go in different directions," he said. "You've done a good job corralling us, and helping us work together is an unusual skill set you possess."

Board Chairwoman Debbie Poochigian hailed Navarrette as "a steady, exceptional leader," and touted his ability to handle several tasks at once.

Navarrette, 62, thanked the board, his family and staff for their efforts and understanding.

For much of the past seven years, the county has been in financial straits.

"I've been blessed by God to perform," he told supervisors. "Many times I just had to ponder, pray and think."

In recognizing his wife and family, he pointed out that "they all let me know when I get home I'm not the CAO."

After 31 years with county government, Navarrette said a new direction is "helpful and healthy" for the county.

"It's time for a change, it's time for a new leader," he said. "It's time for a new CAO; I'm very happy to have served as long as I have. If anything, this signifies that anybody starting in the county, as I did, as a staff analyst, many years ago, can be your CAO."

- In other action, the supervisors supported preparation of an environmental impact report for the county's general plan review.

The document will cost about \$850,000 and replaces a plan for a negative declaration, a less-detailed environmental report. Supervisor Debbie Poochigian was the lone no vote because she thought the less-detailed document was sufficient and much less costly.

Having an environmental impact report will create a stronger document, said Alan Weaver, the county's public works and planning director.

The county is using a sole-source contract because it will save up to five months in the process, county officials say.

A handful of community members opposed the "scope of work" because they were concerned about opportunities for public input.

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