

Todd McGee reelected Holyoke City Council president; attempt to unseat Councilor Israel Rivera falls flat

Updated: Jan. 03, 2022, 3:20 p.m. | Published: Jan. 03, 2022, 3:20 p.m. [Story source: MassLive.com](#)

By **Dennis Hohenberger** | **Special to The Republican**

HOLYOKE — The City Council on Monday unanimously reelected Ward 7 Councilor Todd McGee to a third, two-year term as the body's president.

The council met in a brief session moments after Monday's inauguration ceremony at city hall.

McGee praised former Ward 2 Councilor Terence Murphy for serving as acting mayor after Alex B. Morse's March 26 resignation. He also honored the legacy of former Mayor Martin Dunn, who died in September.

He said Dunn taught him to work tirelessly on behalf of constituents and the city of Holyoke while respecting council colleagues. He then thanked his fellow councilors for reelecting him as president.

McGee's moment was interrupted by Councilor at Large Kevin Jourdain and Ward 5 Councilor Linda Vacon contesting the seating of Councilor at Large Israel Rivera. Jourdain cited a 2017 ordinance that prevents a city worker from sitting on the council.

But the predicted showdown between both sides never came. Rivera explained that he resigned from the school department late last week. Moments later, Vacon and Jourdain withdrew their motions.

"I've yet to enjoy actually winning the at-large seat, to soak in the fact that I get to sit in front on these barriers," Rivera said as he stood near the gallery's rails. "Eventually, I'll have a picture on the wall. But, mentally, it has not soaked in."

Rivera said he plans to focus on youth engagement and programming and quality-of-life issues. He said he has noticed more residents attending council and subcommittee meetings.

"It's time to capitalize on some of that to get people involved," he said.

Rivera said he plans to move on from Monday's challenge by Vacon and Jourdain.

"I did five years in prison. This is nothing," he said, referring to a conviction (** see below) for selling marijuana.

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HOLYOKE

Route 202 closed

A one-mile section of Route 202 was closed yesterday after a gravel truck overturned, resulting in non-life threatening injuries to the driver.

The accident occurred around 2:30 p.m. on Route 202 near Westfield, according to police Sgt. Larry D. Cournoyer. A second vehicle went off the road, but Cournoyer said

police were still investigating whether the second vehicle collided with the gravel truck or was simply trying to avoid it.

The unidentified driver of the gravel truck sustained non-life threatening injuries as a result of the accident, Cournoyer said.

Route 202 was closed from Homestead Avenue to Apremont Highway as a result of the accident, which spilled gravel all over the road, Cournoyer said. The road was still closed at 7 p.m. last night, but Cournoyer said he expected the road to reopen later last night.

The cause of the accident remains under investigation, Cournoyer said.

****SPRINGFIELD**

Prison sentence

Israel Rivera, 21, of Holyoke, was sentenced to five years in state prison Wednesday after pleading guilty to cocaine trafficking and other charges. Hampden Superior Court Judge Constance M. Sweeney sentenced Rivera after taking his guilty plea. Other charges to which Rivera pleaded guilty were possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of a firearm in commission of a felony, two counts of assault and battery on a police officer and two counts of possession of a firearm without a firearms identification charge. Rivera was indicted in January for an incident taking place Dec. 12, 2006, in Holyoke. The state agreed not to go forward on three charges including conspiracy to violate the drug laws and violation of a drug free school zone.

CHICOPEE Application help

Seniors who need help filling out applications for MassHealth, Prescription Advantage, food stamps and fuel assistance may make appointments with Bob Fimbel at the Chicopee Senior Center, 7 Valley View Court.

Available days and hours are Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Wednesdays from noon to 4 p.m. and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to noon. For an appointment, call (413) 534-3698.

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

STAFF, 'Briefs', Republican, The (online), 16 Nov 2007 B01

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He was released a decade ago.

He joins a slate of new faces in the council chambers, including Ward 1 Councilor Jenny Rivera (no relation), Ward 2 Councilor Will Puello, Ward 4 Councilor Kocayne Givner, and Councilors at Large Tessa Murphy-Romboletti and Jose Maldonado-Velez.

Murphy-Romboletti said, "It's a little surreal, to be honest, but it's great. I'm excited to be in this capacity." She worked in city government for five years before leading the EforAll Program, a small business incubator. "I know some of the unique challenges that city departments face."

Puello said he was ready to "knock out the agenda" and support several Jourdain initiatives, including educational programming and lifting a moratorium on new natural gas connections imposed by Holyoke Gas & Electric. He said wants to carry the baton of Murphy's legacy.