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Rallying Dems, Avedisian announces bid for 6th term

By JOHN HOWELL

It came as no surprise. Even before the invitations went out and the date was set, Scott Avedisian was expected to seek a sixth term for mayor.

On Tuesday evening at the Top of the Bay restaurant in Oakland Beach with a refreshing breeze off Greenwich Bay wafting through the second story deck, Avedisian outlined accomplishments of his administration and said by working together Warwick can continue to grow and create new jobs.

But there was a surprise and it was in the form of the man who introduced him – former State Representative Peter Ginaitt.

A Democrat, Ginaitt resigned last August as a legislator because of the pressures of a new job as director of emergency management for Lifespan.

“Changing [the city administration] for partisan reasons doesn’t make sense,” Ginaitt said after Avedisian made his bid for another two years official. “This is the right thing to do. You can play partisan politics but it doesn’t fix anything.”

It’s not likely that Ginaitt would head up a Democrats for Avedisian as some suggested at Tuesday’s affair. But Avedisian has convinced at least one former Democrat to run on his ticket. In the audience of about 125 was Steven Colantuono who lost in a Democratic primary for the Ward 1 nomination to Robert Cushman two years ago. Colantuono has scheduled an announcement for Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. at the Aspray Boat House. He is going to run as a Republican against Cushman.

Avedisian is delighted to have Colantuono on his ticket and he anticipates, with the exception of possibly two seats, to field a slate aimed at making inroads to the all-Democratic council.

Winning Ward 1 would be an especially meaningful prize for Avedisian. It is the ward that Avedisian once represented and that his close political ally, Sue Stenhouse, represented before running for Secretary of State two years ago. Stenhouse served as master of ceremonies at Tuesday’s event. Since then Cushman, a former member of the School Committee, has held the seat. Cushman has been a persistent critic of Avedisian, a hypocritical role, in Avedisian’s view, because much of the city’s financial woes stem from the teachers’ contract Cushman backed as chairman of the School Committee.

Asked to name other council candidates, Avedisian said he felt more comfortable having them announce their intentions.

In fact, Avedisian made a point in his speech of mentioning how many of the Democrats who he has faced in various contests have come to endorse him. But he downplayed the partisan issue.

“It is not – and it will never be – about scoring political points. It is instead at its core an effort about only one thing - doing what is right for our city and our state,” he said.

Yet, Avedisian couldn't help but comment on how, despite the preponderance of Warwick Democrats (Rep. Joseph Trillo is the only other Republican to hold an elective partisan seat in the city), he won every one of the city's nine wards two years ago. Avedisian garnered about 70 percent of the vote even as Republicans across the board were swept away by a wave of anti-Bush sentiment. So far the only Democrat to announce a run against Avedisian is Jack Kirby, a contractor who has run for Senator twice, once in 1992 and again in 1994, but never won an elected post.

At 43 years old, however, those following Avedisian's political career question how much longer he can continue being mayor before the job wears on him and he loses momentum. Two years ago he was seen as a potential candidate for lieutenant governor, but Avedisian backed away for a bid for the slot when Senator Elizabeth Roberts, a Democrat and a friend, announced her candidacy. He similarly is not seen as entering a contest for the Second Congressional District, as another friend James Langevin, is the incumbent.

Avedisian showed no sign of tiring of the mayor's job Tuesday night.

“We have accomplished a lot over these last 20 years,” he said referencing his first successful run for council, “we have a lot still to do. By marshalling our collective energies, I believe we can continue to grow our economy and create new jobs. We can continue to protect the environment. We can continue to improve health care. We can do it because we know that when we work as a team.”

That team, as was evidenced by those who had bought tickets and were in attendance, includes a lot of Democrats.