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Tom O'Malley best choice for mayor of Atascadero

Atascadero Mayor Tom O'Malley is running for another term as mayor. **David Middlecamp** dmiddlecamp@thetribunenews.com

BY THE TRIBUNE EDITORIAL BOARD

Mayor Tom O'Malley has a long history of public service in Atascadero and stands out as the most qualified of the three candidates.

He has the political experience, the knowledge of local and regional politics and the professionalism required for the job. He's also one of the hardest working mayors we've encountered, and there's no question that he loves Atascadero and wants to see the city prosper.

O'Malley's background in mental health administration and counseling is another asset — not just to Atascadero, but also to the region. He was the first locally elected official to come out in support of a controversial but much-needed psychiatric hospital planned for Templeton. That took courage, and we commend him for that.

He also deserves credit for leading the city in making substantial progress in promoting itself as a tourist destination, and in continuing efforts to revitalize its commercial core.

We believe, though, that Atascadero could do more to capitalize on its historic downtown. One example: We would like to see the mayor take more of a leadership role in promoting rehabilitation and reuse of the historic Printery building. O'Malley points out that the city can't afford to take the project on. We get that, but the city could be more enthusiastic about the potential benefits of a revamped Printery.

There are other times we haven't seen eye to eye with O'Malley.

Last year, we [criticized his poor judgment](#) in posting an item on his Facebook page written by a conspiracy nut who warned of Muslims taking over the White House. At the time, O'Malley told us it's "in keeping with my tradition of offending folks at both ends of the political spectrum." That's no excuse, and if he hasn't already done so, O'Malley must start vetting the items he posts on Facebook much more carefully.

We've also faulted O'Malley for approving [a 2012 agreement with Wal-Mart](#) that left the city on the hook for millions of dollars in road improvements. Although the issue is an old one, it remains a point of frustration for some residents, and with good cause.

Back on the plus side, the city continues to be known for the relative affordability of its housing. That's good, but as O'Malley points out, the city also needs to focus on building the economy and providing jobs.

He's absolutely right. We'd like to see the city spend less time on small matters such as sign ordinances and focus more energy on the bigger picture of overall economic development.

If he's elected to another term — as we believe he should be — we strongly urge Tom O'Malley to work toward that goal.

ELECTION 2016: ATASCADERO MAYOR

Term: Two years

Candidates: Ann Ketcherside, property manager; Nicholas Mattson, newspaper sports editor; Tom O'Malley, incumbent

The Tribune endorses: Tom O'Malley