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ELECTION

Four-way race for Ward 7 seat on EBMUD board of directors

Incumbent April Chan facing challengers Gary Wolff, Luis Reynoso and Joseph Grcar for seat representing part of San Ramon



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From left, the candidates competing to represent Ward 7 on the East Bay Municipal Utility District board include incumbent April Chan and challengers Greg Wolff, Luis Reynoso and Joseph Grcar.

Incumbent April Chan is seeking a second term on the East Bay Municipal Utility District board, facing three challengers in the Nov. 3 election. The Ward 7 seat represents portions of San Ramon, along with San Lorenzo, San Leandro and all of Castro Valley.

Chan was elected in 2022 with 34.6% of the vote, finishing just 0.3% ahead of Corina Lopez and about three percentage points ahead of Matt Turner. She succeeded longtime director Frank Mellon, who was first elected in 1994.

Three challengers seek to unseat Chan

Chan has centered her reelection campaign on maintaining affordable water rates, accountability and transparency, adding that she has a record from her first term on the board to back up those promises. She is highlighting her work to implement a fire hydrant inspection standard for the district and her votes to cap rate increases and eliminate the 8% drought surcharge once conditions allowed and to prevent a soil dumping project near Lake Chabot.

Chan is also emphasizing her calls for transparency reforms after raising concerns about $279 million in funds being transferred between projects within the district without public review, something she said she believes is at the heart of the campaigns of her three opponents, Luis Reynoso, Greg Wolff and Joseph Grcar.

Reynoso and Grcar are both prolific political candidates who have previously run to challenge incumbents in races ranging from Congress to local special districts. Both are set to appear on the ballot multiple times in next week's election.

Reynoso is also running for the BART and AC Transit boards. He previously served as an at-large member of the Hayward Unified School District Board after being elected in 2008.

"The decision to run for different offices simultaneously is not just a strategic move but a powerful statement about the state of democracy in these districts," Reynoso said on the website for his three concurrent campaigns. "I understand that when elections are uncontested, democracy weakens when the same incumbents do not face opposing candidates."

In the EBMUD race, Reynoso's platform emphasizes investment in infrastructure, reliability, fiscal responsibility, public health, transparency and accountability.

"In a time of aging infrastructure, climate stress and rising demands on public utilities, strong leadership matters more than ever," Reynoso said.

Reynoso said he would support pipeline replacement, treatment modernization, conservation and other infrastructure projects while pushing for additional transparency "so residents know where every dollar goes and how construction will affect their communities."

“This is about practical leadership, responsible planning and protecting the future we all share,” Reynoso wrote. “Let’s invest wisely, demand accountability and keep our water system strong without letting rates spiral out of control.”

Grcar also said he was motivated to run in multiple races in response to past uncontested elections in the region that result in appointment, rather than election, of representatives to vacant seats. He also criticized sitting members of the 10 different special districts he lives within for being inaccessible to constituents.

“I ran for all 10 of my districts over 2024 to 2026,” Grcar said on his campaign website. “I fight for our representative form of government. I am the first person – ever – to run for all 10. It’s not just a bucket-list thing on my part.”

Grcar is competing with Reynoso for the Ward 5 seat on the AC Transit board and running for the Castro Valley Sanitation District, the East Bay Regional Park District, the Eden Township Healthcare District and the Castro Valley Unified School District board. In the June primary, he ran for seats on the BART Board of Directors, Alameda County Board of Education, Chabot Las Positas Board of Trustees and the Hayward Area Recreation and Parks District.

In his campaign for EBMUD, Grcar criticized spending on administrative staff, lack of transparency, existing infrastructure projects and rate increases.

“How can costs rise 6.4% annually without change through droughts and pandemics since 2001? I do not believe it, and I simply won’t vote for any price increases,” Grcar said on his campaign website.

While he noted that conservation programs had reduced demand in the district, he called for additional measures to address water needs. He said that conservation “is not a long-term business model,” noted that “customers understandably question why rates continue to rise while they get less water” and called for new technology as a better solution.

“Today, desalination powered by next-generation small modular nuclear reactors could provide a drought-proof and virtually unlimited water supply,” Grcar said. “The Middle East already demonstrates the viability of large-scale desalination, and new reactor designs promise clean, reliable power with enhanced safety and lower costs.”

Unlike the other two challengers, Wolff is a first-time political candidate. He is running as “a water expert, not a politician,” according to his campaign website.

Wolff said his early work in construction gave way to an interest in renewable energy and technology, and a decades-long career as a civil engineer focused on water resources and sanitation. That included a 2006 appointment by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to the California State Water Resources Control Board, where he served as vice chair. He went on to work as executive director for StopWaste in 2009 before retiring in 2015.

Wolff's public service includes stints on a number of non-elected bodies for public agencies, including the EBMUD Demand Management Advisory Committee, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Alameda County Source Reduction and Recycling Board and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Desalination Research Roadmap Project.

"I've always wanted to shape our built environment so we can live comfortably and sustainably," Wolff said on his campaign website.

Wolff and Chan trade barbs, compete for endorsements

Wolff was the first challenger to emerge in this year's Ward 7 race, announcing his candidacy in February. He and Chan have been competing for endorsements, campaign donations and ultimately votes ever since.

In June, Wolff announced that he had secured endorsements from Chan's counterparts on the board representing wards 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

"Gary Wolff has extensive knowledge of the engineering and economics of water and sanitation systems and the proven ability to work effectively with a wide range of stakeholders," said Luz Gómez, board president and Ward 2 director. "He has led statewide and countywide public agencies and would be a steady presence as the board strives to do what's best for our customers."

Wolff has gone on to receive endorsements from labor unions and a number of public officials, including Rep. Mark Desaulnier (D-Concord), Asm. Liz Ortega (D-San Leandro), Rep. Aisha Wahab (D-Hayward), Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen and all four members of the San Ramon City Council.

Chan's endorsements include Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley, San Ramon Mayor Mark Armstrong, San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District board President Jay Kerr, San Ramon Valley Unified School District Board President Susanna Ordway, Contra Costa Community College District trustee Andy Li, East Bay Regional Parks District board President Olivia Sanwong and Dublin Mayor Sherry Hu.

As of Oct. 19, Wolff and Chan were neck and neck in campaign contributions at $29,070 and $29,699, respectively.

Wolff and Chan's rivalry heated up last week as Chan defended her record against allegations in a recent mailer from Wolff's campaign. The mailer pointed to an investigation and censure of Chan by the board over a March 2025 altercation she had with Tracey Conway, an artist whose work had been on display at the EBMUD headquarters in Oakland.

Conway had been parked in the district garage while removing her work from display when Chan confronted her to ask if she had permission to park there. An argument reportedly ensued. The investigation determined Chan had violated the "principles" of the district's policies by being disrespectful and dismissive of Conway. It did not sustain allegations that Chan had racially discriminated against Conway, who identifies as Black, or that Chan had violated any laws or district policies.

However, investigators received a number of complaints from district employees about their interactions with Chan and found "a preponderance of evidence" to sustain allegations that she had berated, retaliated against, silenced and publicly shamed some staff members.

The censure, approved by the board on Nov. 12, 2025, cited investigative findings of "behavior that demoralizes and creates fear among the district's hard-working, dedicated employees … and undermines their ability to do their jobs." Chan was also stripped of her vice president title and other roles.

"Decide for yourself what the censure means," Wolff said in a blog post on his campaign website last week.

Chan took to her own campaign website earlier in the week to share her perspective on the situation, classifying the censure as retaliation by the board and highlighting her respect for district staff.

"When you ask hard questions about how $279 million is being managed, not everyone is happy about it. When you stand with 1,500 of your neighbors to shut down a dumping project that the institution wanted to move forward, some people push back," Chan said on her campaign website.

She noted that despite the board's censure and concerns revealed by the investigations, she had been cleared of allegations of racism, violence and misconduct violating the district's policies.

"April asked that the resolution note the investigations did not find racially motivated conduct on her part," Chan's campaign said on her website. "She accepted the board's directives and has continued to serve her constituents without interruption."

Chan last week addressed the allegations that spurred the investigation and Wolff's characterization of its findings.

"Some have claimed I'm 'anti-staff.' I want to set the record straight, because nothing could be further from how I've served," Chan said.

She pointed to her support for two former EBMUD employees who sued the district for discrimination and retaliation. A judge ruled against the district in 2023, and Chan later was one of two district board members to vote against appealing the ruling. The appeal was ultimately unsuccessful.

"That vote wasn't easy, and it wasn't popular on the board. I cast it because I believe a public agency must treat its people with fairness and basic decency, especially when it has been found to have fallen short," Chan said. "Respecting staff doesn't mean never asking hard questions. My job is to hold the district accountable to the people of Ward 7. Sometimes that means pushing management on performance and standards. But accountability and respect for employees go hand in hand, and my record shows both."

Chan's campaign pointed to Wolff's record during his tenure at StopWaste, "an agency funded mostly by East Bay garbage bills," and his $213,000 salary in the role amid a sharp rise in those bills.

In a social media video last week, Chan's campaign highlighted Wolff's vote to approve a 36% increase in permit fees during his time on the state water board. Wolff responded on his campaign website with a blog post days later.

"I hear that my opponent thinks that a vote while I served on the State Water Resources Control Board means I can't be trusted as a fiscal watchdog if elected as EBMUD Director," Wolff said on Oct. 22. "What she doesn't tell anyone is that the state water board is required by law to adjust annual permit fees to match the revenue level in the Budget Act."

Wolff added that the budget adopted by the state legislature and signed by the governor dictates fee changes, which he said the board has no discretion over.

"Her accusation has no relevance to your water bills," Wolff said, adding that the average residential water bill in the district had increased by 33.5% during Chan's tenure.

Although pledging not to vote in favor of increased rates, Grcar said all of his opponents were either uninformed or misleading voters with promises to maintain or reduce water rates.

“East Bay politicians complain about water rates just to get your vote,” Grcar said. “Politicians can’t fix water rates because EBMUD has to serve fast-growing parts of Contra Costa County but the Mokelumne River cannot grow to serve them, so EBMUD has to pay to use Sacramento River water.”

Grcar also challenged Wolff’s characterization of himself as a political outsider, pointing to his endorsements from “every elected official in the East Bay.”

“He is an ambitious politician trying to unseat the incumbent of his own party,” Grcar said. “Enjoy the show, and vote for Joseph Grcar instead.”

More on Chan’s campaign is available at chan4ebmud.com. More on Reynoso’s campaign is available at electreynoso.com. More on Grcar’s campaign is available at alamedacountyelections.org. More on Wolff’s campaign is available at wolff4water.org.