Rogue Valley Times
Nov. 3, 2026

UPDATE: Medford City Council incumbents maintain leads in bid for reelection

Published 9:56 pm Tuesday, November 3, 2026

By Buffy Pollock

Stine leads challenger Mace by just over 100 votes; Vargas leads three-way race to replace outgoing council member Zac Smith

Editor's note: *This story has been updated with new, unofficial numbers from the Jackson County Elections Office.*

Medford City Council members Kevin Stine and Nick Card appear headed for victory in their respective races, albeit by drastically different margins, according to updated election results posted to the Oregon Secretary of State's website on Wednesday.

Four council seats were up for grabs, with incumbents Stine and Card likely to remain in office, and newcomers filling a pair of seats being vacated by Council President Jessica Ayres and council member Zac Smith, who decided against bids for reelection.

Ward 2, Vargas, Williams, Ryan

In the most contested race, the three-way challenge for the seat of outgoing Ward 2 council member Zac Smith garnered 6,065 total votes cast.

Beto Vargas, director of educational services for Kids Unlimited, commanded just over 50%, or 3,038, of votes cast compared to 28% (1,711 votes cast) for U.S. Dept. of Agriculture hemp compliance and enforcement officer and Medford School District board member Michael Williams, followed by just over 20% (1,261 votes) for BELFOR Environmental and Compliance regional manager Chris Ryan, Wednesday morning results showed.

Contacted by the Rogue Valley Times on Tuesday night, Vargas expressed gratitude and excitement to represent his community in city government.

“I was hoping that if I won, it would be a no-contest race,” Vargas told the Times. “That was my Easter egg. A Latino city councilor winning by a landslide. I think that’s a first in Medford, so I’m very, very happy.”

Vargas said community leaders in Medford approached him and asked him to run, and that he was eager to represent the West Medford community.

“My hope is that I can be a strong presence for West Medford and bring more harmony into the City Council,” he said. “I had just finished my degrees and had a solid job here and I feel like this was the time to step up and serve. … I didn’t want to just be a complainer.

“I wanted to step up and be part of the solution,” Vargas said, noting he hoped to be “an agent of public good” and ensure his constituents felt their voices would be heard.

“For me, it’s not about blue and red. It’s just improving people’s quality of life. Who doesn’t want that?”

Ward 3, Stine vs. Mace

In a bid by incumbents Stine and Card, Stine held a marginal 132-vote lead over Jefferson Baroque Orchestra Director Abigail Mace on Wednesday morning, while Card held a nearly 1,300-plus-vote lead over challenger Alan Jackson, an instructor for Rogue Community College, based on updated Wednesday electoin results.

Stine expressed gratitude for the chance to run and serve another term, if numbers hold out in his favor. A local educator and provider of naval military funeral honors, Stine said he expected a close race. Early results showed Stine with 2,694 votes compared to 2,562 for Mace.

“I 100% thought it was going to be close. These are tough races,” Stine said. “Every race I’ve won has been close. I won by 105 votes four years ago.

“The thought is always that I’d better go to work and tell people what I’ve done and what I what I still want to do and then just see what the voters think about it,” he said.

If reelected, Stine said he would strive for “a combination of keeping the things we have going, going … but also expanding and looking at what more we can do — in some respects, to level up — to make the city more livable and make it where people are proud of where they live.”

Ward 4, Card vs. Jackson

Card, who serves as vice president of operations for his family’s trucking business, Combined Transport, led with 5,349 votes compared to 4,062 for Jackson. Card, who did not respond to messages by the Times, is a first-term City Council member.

A fourth available council seat will be filled by former Medford City Manager Brian Sjothun, who retired from a 36-year public service career in 2024. Sjothun ran unopposed to replace outgoing City Council President Jessica Ayres, who decided not to seek reelection.

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