

# Issues, leadership greet new Council

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

The reorganization meeting of the Orange City Council, which will include members taking their oaths of office, is scheduled at noon today in the Orange Middle School auditorium.

South Ward Councilman Edward Marable, North Ward Councilwoman Tency Eason and West Ward Councilman Hassan Abdul-Rasheed will sworn into new four-year terms. The lone new comer will be Linda Jones-Bell of the East Ward. She defeated Councilwoman Lisa Perkins by a narrow margin during the municipal election in May.

There are questions which may face the council during the next two years. Some residents question if Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. has a solid four-vote majority on the council to help push his agenda for Orange's future since he endorsed each winning candidate in the last election except Eason.

With his recent re-election as chairman of the Orange Democratic Committee, Hawkins appeared to be poised to solidify his power base thanks to the support many believe he now has on the council.

Additional talk surrounds the council president's position and if Marable will be selected by his colleagues to serve another year.

Among potential candidates for the post is Abdul-Rasheed. He retained the seat previously occupied by Maria Vandermeer, who surprised some residents when she expressed her support for him during the election campaign. Vandermeer challenged Abdul-Rasheed's victory in the 2006 election.

Some council watchers believe Abdul-Rasheed has the inside track for the president's post. His ability to bridge divides between rivals and forge successful coalitions, said one observer, is what the council needs more than anything else.

"We need someone who can unite people and bring the council together to do the work that needs to be done in the city," said Bruce Meyer, who led the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee during the 2009-10 fiscal year. "Ed Marable is a good, honest man who has been working behind the scenes doing lot of things that the average citizen does not know about. If he is not reappointed to serve a second term as council president, then we need someone who is just as dedicated to doing things the right way.

If Abdul-Rasheed is chosen by his peers to lead them, it represents a remarkable reversal of fortunes for a man who was officially censured by those same people a little more than a year ago.

That punishment was handed down to him while Perkins was serving as the council's president and it came as a result of outbursts and tirades from him that were directed toward council members and audience members.