

## CITY COUNCIL MEETING (3-21-16)

### Lifeguards

Faced with an mounting budget deficit, Interim City Manager John Baker painted a bleak picture of the City's fiscal health along with a host of cost savings measures to shore up its General Fund. Elimination of the City's Lifeguard and Jr. Lifeguard Programs were among the options considered.

With an overflow crowd of more than 100 people, supporters provided compelling testimony to save the programs. Together, these programs cost the City \$175,900 each year to operate between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Hueneme is one of very few beaches in Ventura County that provide such services.

### Animal Control

The City of Port Hueneme contracts for animal control services through the County of Ventura. These services consist of regulatory enforcement, intake of strays and abandoned pets, shelter and care of incarcerated animals, neighborhood canvassing and pet licensing.

In a mere span of three years, the cost of these services have increased from \$79,000 to more than \$180,000. Today, the County seeks an additional payment of \$35,000 to cover anticipated costs for the current fiscal year, with a forthcoming FY2016-17 billing of \$224,000.

### Unlawful Activities

Twice in less than three years, the Ventura County District Attorney has instructed City officials to stop violating open meeting laws. The first such instance occurred during the 2013 hiring process for former City Manager Cynthia Haas. The most recent violation occurred in connection the infamous "team building workshop" that was conducted on October 31, 2015.

Each violation alleged by the District Attorney centers around the question



of whether general discussion regarding personnel recruitment can be conducted behind closed doors as opposed to matters specific to individuals. In short, closed sessions may only be used in the latter instance.

During Council discussions, Members Tom Figg and Jim Hensley advocated for a Public Safety Parcel Tax to raise a dedicated funding source to underwrite lifeguard and police services. These ideas were rejected by the incumbent majority consisting of Members Douglas Breeze, Jonathan Sharkey and Sylvia Munoz Schnopp.

During Council discussion, more questions were asked than answers provided. The issues included: (i) the minimum level of service the County is required to provide by statute; (ii) the cause and effect of escalating costs (36% increase in the current year) as compared to the decrease in revenues (27%); and (iii) the cost associated with "no kill" euthanizing policies that require greater long term care while reducing shelter capacity.

By unanimous vote of the Council, the City declined to make the supplemental payment of \$35,000 requested by the County pending a full budgetary presentation by Animal Services personnel.

The Hensley Law Group which has served as City Attorney since ??????, recommended that the City Council simply heed the DA's request that the City "cease and desist" the activities in question. Council Members Figg and Hensley took exception to that recommendation.

When the final vote was taken, the incumbent majority opted to retain the lifeguard programs without any identified source of funding. Instead, they gave vague direction to staff to explore alternative ways of reducing program costs. Equally vague was direction provided by Mayor ProTem Sharkey to study the outsourcing of all public services, including public safety.

When the dust settled, Figg and Hensley voted no because of the City's structural deficit and failure of the incumbent majority to stop spending money the City doesn't have. A Public Safety Parcel Tax, on the other hand, would allow the community to decide service priorities and provide a dedicated revenue source for saving lives.

**"Staff from all member agencies are currently working with Ventura County Animal Services to come up with a different methodology for next year's budget. It has been mutually agreed upon that this current contract is not working..."**

Instead, Figg and Hensley pointed out that they were not part of the City Council in 2013 when the first Brown Act violation occurred and did not partake in the unlawful discussions that occurred on October 31, 2016.

As such, Figg and Hensley voted against the recommendation and asked the record reflect that the violation of open meeting laws are specific to the incumbent Council comprised of Breeze, Schnopp and Sharkey. Meanwhile, the incumbents voted in favor of the recommendation.