

## Claremont City Council

League of Women Voters of the Claremont Area Observer Report

By Observer Betsey Coffman

May 24, 2018

The city of Claremont, California is a general law city, which means it follows the state government laws and regulations concerning cities. (The other type of city in California is the charter city, which has its own charter or “constitution” for municipal affairs but is subject to state law in matters of state affairs. Charter cities theoretically have more autonomy, but the state can declare what the city considers “municipal” to be a state matter and thus have the final decision-making power.) The Claremont City Council sets policy and hires a City Manager to supervise the day-to-day functioning of the city staff. To help with all this are the five city Commissions, which advise and assist the City Council in specific areas – Architecture, Community and Human Services, Planning, Police, and Traffic & Transportation.

There are five members of the City Council, each elected for a four-year term. The positions of Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem are rotated yearly – currently Opanyi Nasiali is serving as Mayor, and Corey Calaycay is serving as Mayor Pro Tem. Mr. Nasiali, who has a background in municipal planning, both in Kenya and the United States, is serving his second term on the Council; it will expire in November of 2018. He represents Claremont on the League of California Cities Selection Committee and the L. A. County Sanitation District #21, as well as participating on local Boards and Committees. Mr. Calaycay is now in his fourth term on the Council; it will expire in 2020. Prior to his election to the City Council, he worked for a number of representatives in the state Legislature and now represents the City at the League of California Cities, and the Foothill Transit Governing Board among other duties. Joe Lyons, a second-term Councilman, does not plan to run for reelection after his present term ends in November of 2018. His professional career was in medical research, and his Council activities have led to service on Mental Health Boards, as well as terms on local water Boards (Six Basins and Three Valleys) and Pomona Valley Transit Authority. Sam Pedroza’s third term on Claremont’s City Council ends in November 2018. He is currently employed as an Environmental Planner for the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County; as a Council member he represents the city on the Metro Gold Line Board, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments (COG). Larry Schroeder is now in his third term on the Council; it will expire in November of 2020. With a background in private-sector banking and as a former Finance Director in city government, he has taught in his fields of expertise in nearby Universities. He serves as Council representative to the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority, the Independent Cities Association and the local Committee on Aging.

The Council is assisted by city staff, many of whom regularly attend the twice-monthly, Tuesday-evening meetings held at the City Council Chamber at 225 Second Street in Claremont. Flanking the Council, whose seats are at the north end of the Chamber, are the City Manager and City Attorney on the west side and the City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk on the east side. The first two or three rows on the east are occupied by the heads or representatives of the various city departments – Administration, Finance, Police, Community Development, Community Services, and Human Services.

Agendas are available in the Chamber Entry Room, and the meetings proceed in an orderly fashion. The Agendas, accompanied by staff recommendations and relevant documents, are available on the city website on the Thursdays before the Tuesday meetings. I have not been able to attend as regularly as in the past, but I have attended over half of the Council’s sessions. The Council members are almost always well-prepared, as evidenced by their questions and comments. Matters that come before the Council include resolutions of all kinds (including approval of expenditures and contracts often combined into the “Consent Calendar” for routine, recurring situations), ordinances (city laws), and public hearings that often deal with plans for “something new.” Staff members are generally well prepared and arrange for persons involved in the various issues to be present to

answer the Council's questions. I usually find the back-and-forth exchanges and Council members' explanations of their thinking on their decisions to be straightforward and interesting. The meetings are attended by varying numbers of local residents, the number depending on the subject matter of the evening, and periods for public comment are scheduled in the Agenda. The local newspaper reporter regularly attends, and summaries of the meetings appear in the *Claremont Courier*.

Although the 2017-18 Council meetings topics have not been as lively as last year's negative decision on Claremont's attempt to acquire its water company or the request to become a Sanctuary City, there have been some memorable sessions. In its October 10, 2017 Council Meeting, the announcement was made that the city had dropped its appeal to overturn the decision denying Claremont the power of eminent domain to purchase Golden State Water Company, due to the appeal attorney's opinion that the chance of success was "slim." This has resulted in Claremont being liable for Golden State's legal expenses, and, despite a settlement agreement with the Water Company, has been a very disappointing episode for the city's Council and citizens.

Several Council meetings have dealt with transportation issues -- particularly the planned construction and installation of the Gold Line, an electrically-powered light rail system which will provide frequent stops and thus facilitate public travel from town to town in Los Angeles County and neighboring areas. The Gold Line has now been completed to the town of Monrovia, west of Claremont, and plans to extend it through Claremont to Montclair are under way. One of the issues in Claremont is the Indian Hill Boulevard crossing of the proposed rail track, which will be built parallel to the existing Metrolink train track. The Gold Line Authority first offered to build an overpass bridge for its train, anticipating traffic congestion on Indian Hill Boulevard with a surface-level crossing. Proposals of the bridge were drawn, but the citizens of Claremont were distressed because the drawings depicted a bulky division of the city into north and south sections. The Council voted against the overpass. Then the Public Utilities Commission got involved, with predictions of congestion and safety concerns with a surface-level crossing. Finally, a new bridge design was proposed and approved by the Council in its October 10, 2017, meeting.

In February 2018, Claremont welcomed a new City Manager, Tara Schultz. She formerly was the Assistant City Manager in Alhambra and also worked in city government positions in Sierra Madre. This transition appears to be working well.

It has been a pleasure for me to be the League Observer for the Claremont City Council. I have learned a lot, and I am impressed by the hard work being done by the Council members, the City staff, and the citizens of Claremont, who seem to take a great interest in their local government.