

Upland City Council
League of Women Voters of Mt. Baldy Area
Observer Report by Cynthia Reul
April 2018 – April 2019
Delivered May 13, 2019

City Council Members: Debbie Stone, Mayor; Janice Elliott, Mayor Pro Tem;
Ricky Felix, Rudy Zuniga, Bill Velto

This is my 8th year of observing the Upland City Council. I attended 15 meetings and two special sessions. The Council is attentive and respectful to the citizens at the meetings. They are prepared to address the issues at hand. No Brown Act violations have been observed.

The November 2018 elections were our first elections in the City using District Voting. Upland now has four districts, each electing a resident to be a council member, instead of an at-large election. Our mayor is still an at-large elected official. The election welcomed in two new council members. They are Ricky Felix and Rudy Zuniga. In a city that has a 39% Hispanic population, representation by Hispanic Council members is notable. It has been over 60 years since Upland has elected a non-white candidate. Incumbent council member Janice Elliott was re-elected and is now serving as Mayor Pro-Tem. District 1 did not have an election but the seat was vacated by councilmember Sid Robinson. The City Council decided to appoint Bill Velto to serve the remaining term as the representative of District 1 until the next election in 2020.

In December, the new City Council rescinded the censure of councilmember Janice Elliott that was adopted in May of 2018.

Most of the decisions effecting the city of Upland are made with a 5 to 0 vote. However, our new council engages in lively discussions of the issues before voting. To help the citizens better understand how their local government operates, the city has held several public workshop meetings throughout the year to discuss such things as the Brown Act and the increases in water rates. These meetings are designed to help promote transparency in local government. I believe they have been effective and educational.

SB1 Transportation funds are being used to improve our local roads. The Sycamore Hills residential and commercial project on Baseline is providing needed sales tax and property tax revenues. The city has a new Friends of the Library bookstore. It was built entirely by donations and volunteers. It is housed in a previously unused section of our library. Volunteers have also restored our softball field at Green Belt Park.

It wouldn't be Upland without a few hiccups. We have another new City Manager; Rosemary Hoerning has been hired as the Interim City Manager while we search for a new permanent city manager. City Manager Jeanette Vagnozzi was terminated May 13th. She had been on the job since November 2018. She was our 6th City Manager since 2005. The previous city manager, Bill Manis, only lasted 10 months before retiring. We also have a new police chief, Darren Goodman. He is a 27-year veteran of the San Bernardino County Sheriff Department.

A land swap with Lewis Homes to build a new sports park in the north end of the city in exchange for other city park land failed to move forward because the citizens of Upland were strongly opposed. A decision to allow San Antonio Hospital to build a parking structure on four acres of land in the southern area of our Memorial Park is awaiting a court decision after a lawsuit was filed by Upland citizens opposing the proposed parking lot on city park land. That decision is expected before the end of this month.

The City Council continues to struggle with controlling outbursts from the public during our council meetings. In August 2017, our city council instituted and began enforcing Penal Code 403 (a misdemeanor). It prohibits individuals from demonstrating disruptive conduct during city council meetings that prevents the Council from conducting its meeting in an orderly manner. The Council also changed the order of the Public Comments sections of our meetings. Oral communications at the beginning of the meetings can only cover items that are on the agenda. Other concerns of the citizens that are not part of the agenda are held after the business meeting portion of the meeting has concluded. This change has helped.

I look forward to the continued success of our current City Council members.