

The Manhattan Beach Observer

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MANHATTAN BEACH RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
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No Business Funding the Chamber

By Gary Osterhout

In July, the Manhattan Beach City Council approved a \$100,000 payment to the Manhattan Beach Chamber of Commerce, an independent business organization. In the process, the CEO of the Manhattan Beach Chamber of Commerce argued that “subsidy is the wrong word” to describe the funding, in favor of the term “investment.”

I agree with the CEO that “subsidy” is incorrect—in respect that a subsidy is a payment made by government to generate a behavior that the recipient group could likely not do on their own. But I certainly reject the CEO’s attempt to classify the funding as an “investment”—a term that connotes a quantifiable expected return on the dollar, not a blue-sky handout.

The Council asked no more of the Chamber in respect to payback analysis or any return for the money but to:

1) Create partnerships with the local business community to facilitate the City’s economic development. Work alongside the City and local businesses to increase business attraction and retention.

2) Develop a Manhattan Beach Visitor’s Bureau to promote the City as the premier destination in Southern California (by developing the Chamber website and developing a “sizzle reel” for the City of Manhattan Beach).

3) Promote and implement economic development of Manhattan Beach by increasing visits from business travelers and visitors. Set aside the clumsy wording that suggests little thought (“the City as THE premier destination in SoCal?”—more than Disneyland?; “sizzle reel?”; “. . . increasing visits from . . . visitors?”)—doesn’t all of the above sound like the sort of activities for which Chamber of Commerces are formed?

Note that the Council placed no restrictions or provisions for segregation of funds from other Chamber-generated money, or prescribed any accountable description of just what deliverable \$100K is supposed to buy, or when and how such deliverable will be measured.

Given the totality of how this is framed, I believe the more suitable term for the payment would be something like corporate welfare, a gift, a bribe political payback, or plain indiscriminant funding.

I do not fault the CEO for asking for the City for money. In fact, if business can get the government to pay for what

Continue page 5

Save The Date!

It’s a party! It’s a celebration! It’s a birthday! Make no other plans for September 15th from 2:30-5:00 pm. The Manhattan Beach Residents Association is turning 25 and it’s inviting all members past and present as well as family and friends to this warm and special occasion.

The year was 1988—the month, September. Many residents wanted to share their concerns about the community and to have a voice in maintaining some balance in the quality of life in their neighborhoods. In light of our times it is more relevant today than ever before.

The place to remember is the Creative Arts Center, 1560 Manhattan Beach Blvd. What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than with neighbors and friends of our great community. Party planners are already putting together a program we know will please and entertain.

It will be a time of Music, Magic and Memories; there will be refreshments, a prize drawing, and an exciting bottle of wine for a lucky someone’s top bid to take home.

So join your neighbors, bring your family, bring your friends and let’s affirm that ideal that makes our democracy great---the voice of the people!



READY FOR THE “BABY BOOMERS???”

Madonna Newburg, MBRA Senior

Liaison

If you were born between 1946 and 1964, you are one of the so-called “baby boomers.” By the end of this year you will be between the ages of 50 and 68. Our 2010 Federal Census counted about 9,000 Baby Boomers in Manhattan Beach. In 2010 that count was about 26% of our city’s population and forecasted to grow to 30/35% in the not too distant future.

The questions we need to ask to address this changing senior population:

1. What is the plan and VISION for recreation and social needs for this “blooming” growth of seniors in our city’s population?
2. How does our Older Adults Program need to change?
3. What attracts the baby boomers to our current activities and what are the future attractions for these seniors?

We need to think seriously about adequate space for our future senior programs. Our 900 sq.foot Oasis (the only dedicated senior space), a promise of a similar size space in the new Scout House and shared space (when available) at the Joslyn and Heights Centers are certainly not adequate. We cannot even think about a much needed Adult Day Care Center due to lack of space and funds. Is there a city plan for a stand-alone Senior Center?

Who needs to begin planning? Our Parks and Recreation Department has the leadership role with support from our City Council. Along with this leadership, we envision a team of active senior groups to advise and help. In the last 7 to 8 years

these senior groups have worked hard and long to create and maintain the present Older Adults Program: the Senior Resources Committee, Senior Advisory Committee, Heights Senior Club and Joslyn Senior Club.

With Parks and Recreation leadership and with the help of senior advisory groups, action must begin now to create and implement a VISION. The baby boomers are here!!



President's Message

Happy 25th Anniversary to MBRA! For 25 years we've been keeping an eye on our local government so it stays honest. We've had successes and disappointments but we've still standing and Manhattan Beach is a better place because of our existence.

Some of the accomplishments I'm proudest of are:

- 1) the myriad issues of the Observer that have offered a voice to residents about the small gripes and larger issues that matter to our town;
- 2) holding Candidates Forums before elections to allow voters to see candidates answer questions and defend their positions;
- 3) helping folks present their problems to staff or council to be sure they are heard;
- 4) filing an Amicus Brief on the successful side of the City in their suit with the Save the Plastic Bag Coalition before the California Supreme Court;
- 5) holding periodic public informational meetings about issues that concern us all;
- 6) offering information and advocacy to homeowners who couldn't afford the high cost of undergrounding.

I hope MBRA is around 25 and even 100 years from now to keep doing our small part towards improving our community. Tell your neighbors and friends that they should join MBRA so they can feel proud, as you do, to be helping make our town work.

See you at our Anniversary celebration on September 15.

Michelle Murphy



A retrospective review of years of MBRA Observer issues was not only a sentimental journey but also a reminder of the many issues we researched and helped make changes on behalf of the Manhattan Beach community. Throughout the following pages, excerpts from a few articles are printed; complete texts are available if requested...



Editor's Column

A request for Proposal for a Community Survey was discussed, debated and deliberated at the August 8, 2010 City Council meeting. With questions still lingering, Council approved the appointment of a sub committee, comprised of Mayor Pro Tem Howorth and Councilman D'Errico, to make sure questions are valuable and will bring back to council the Request for Proposal. Other than the formation of a sub committee, much of the study concept resonates with a degree of familiarity, sameness, and possible waste.

This City has experienced a number of resident surveys: an initial survey to solicit undergrounding responses produced a resounding negative vote..... and we all know how much that counted. A survey to determine Sepulveda business improvements ended up in the STH (Survey Trash Heap). A resident survey which strongly indicated that a library was paramount, did get us plans to build this structure...but one which has left residents dissatisfied. A survey of neighborhood traffic problems confirmed what we already knew.

Council stated they were seeking ways to improve on excelling—they want a statistically valid survey, one which is representative of a cross section of Manhattan Beach community; they want to know what they are doing right and how to improve.

These are all admirable goals—this Council, more than some previous ones, is to be commended for the efforts demonstrated to reach out to the community and make necessary changes....but much of this information is already available and accessible: read the many emails each councilperson often says is a daily influx; listen to the residents who speak during council meetings; Keep a log of the Audience Participation comments. These are not only those who are frequent participants. Many residents have made just one, often reluctant, appearance, but they had

City Council Report Card					
	Burton	D'Errico	Howorth	Lesser	Powell
Appr. Res. #13-0038 Budget as presented					
Adopt Ord. #13-009: prohibit use of Polystyrene; 1st reading	Abstain	Abstain			



Vote: **YES**



Vote: **NO**

something to say. They just had to be heard and attention paid.

A question which has arisen is: What are you trying to accomplish with the result? Finance Director Moe's presentation appeared to be heavily in favor of the survey, (the budget is a component), but we question his observation that the consultant can come up with the topics. It would seem the residents would best know what impacts their lives.

Some councilpersons thought residents might want clean streets, more accessible parking, less traffic, a feeling of safety---All these have been requested and reported and repeated and have not changed since the very early surveys were administered.

The City's surveys of recent years are of the Yes/No, or Very Satisfied/Somewhat Satisfied/ Very Dissatisfied format. Open-ended questions, which can be more honest and revealing, are generally not included in our surveys. These require coding and sometimes interpretation and more expertise. And so, sub committee notwithstanding, and bringing the RFP back to Council and even to the public, one can only hope that this will provide information not already available.

Council wants to hear from "the silent majority". With less land phones in service, and cell phone numbers possibly not listed, and including the questionnaire in a utility bill considered less reliable---how wide a cross section will be achieved. And what "Right firm will formulate questions"? Having the survey research consultant first do a personal overview survey might assist

in formulating a worthwhile Manhattan Beach survey.

There was indecision about timing: should the survey be conducted before the December holidays or after. And an excellent suggestion which received no council response was to include a survey for city employees. The information gleaned from this might serve to increase both staff and resident satisfaction.

Even as Council seeks further information relating to City matters, there remain areas which have previously been presented and are still waiting: the issue of sidewalk repair; undergrounding districts concerned with need for historically accurate accounting; the City Recovery Costs fees; increasing construction density; the library two-year closing and only a mobile unit's inadequate response.

These are areas which need comprehensive explanation before the first respondent receives the first call and are asked to reply to the first survey question.

And, finally, to what end? What changes can council anticipate making, knowing now the many diverse issues residents long and often repeatedly, have identified.

E.B.



MBRA expresses a hearty welcome to Tony Olmos, new head of Public Works

Special and Exciting and Donated

MBRA member John Scott went the extra yard--in fact, 1,000 of them. His generosity through these past 25 years has been demonstrated in countless immensely appreciated ways. And now, in order to bring something different and exciting to our 25th anniversary, he has donated a gift which will have wide appeal to many.

Quietly, and with characteristic modesty, John Scott said he would donate a bottle of wine to add additional spark to our celebration—an item, we have since learned, can best be described as:

A classic French red wine from the Bordeaux region. A 1973 PETRUS, Pomerol, valued today by connoisseurs at over \$1,000.00 Originally purchased in Manhattan Beach at Stan's Liquor Store in the mid '70's. Its grape content is made up of the Traditional Bordeaux Blend, enriched by the Merlot grape along with a small amount of Cabernet Franc.

...It is this gift which John Scott has given MBRA---and then to the winning bid.



September, 1988: New Manhattan

Beach Residents Group Formed

The continued increase of traffic and density into Manhattan Beach neighborhoods has led to the formation of an organization comprised of residents concerned with protecting the quality of our city...

...Residents who share concerns about the community, who want a voice in maintaining balance in the quality of life in their neighborhoods.....

Report on the El Segundo Power Plant

by Michelle Murphy

El Segundo Energy Center, a subsidiary of NRG, has placed their two new generators and a new steam turbine on line. These improvements were 13 years in planning and several years now in the building. The new generators will be more efficient (the plant brags that the efficiency of the plant will be increased up to 58%) but unlike the old plant which was used only in the last resort because it was more expensive to operate, the new plant will be used more often and will create more pollution for its neighbors--the people of Manhattan Beach and El Segundo and ultimately the people of LA.

And now NRG has filed an amendment with the California Energy Commission that would demolish the two remaining old steam boiler units and replace them with 4 new units of dry-cooled, natural gas-fired electrical generating capacity. The new units will include a combined cycle generator, a steam turbine generator and two simple cycle gas turbines. When completed, the facility's total generating capacity would be 1,022 MW.

If the Commission approves the latest El Segundo amendment, the applicant plans to demolish Units 3 and 4 by the end of 2015. Construction on the project is expected to start by mid-2016 and conclude in 2018. The projected on-line date is summer 2018.

The estimated capital cost for the project would be \$420 to \$500 million. The project is estimated to peak at 422 workers during the 11th month of construction. On the plus side all these new units will eliminate the use of ocean water for once-through cooling which is good for our bay. On the other hand since water isn't needed, the new plant could be built somewhere else instead of next to the ocean and next to ten million pairs of LA lungs that will be breathing the pollution produced by creating this energy for the next 50 years. One reason that isn't being done is that the distribution setup is already here and there is extra cost to transporting energy that can be saved by creating it nearer to users. And we all know energy companies are hurting for profits (heavy sarcasm here--energy companies are raking in record breaking profits but don't wish to use them to save the lungs of LA Basin residents).

Also on the plus side, these new units are fast-start units which can be used to supplement solar and wind power that sometimes stop suddenly when clouds cover the sun or the wind stops. Alternative energy is a great thing but the fast start ups also mean extra heavy noise and pollution during those startups when the go pedal is pushed to the floor.

The project is projected to exceed the one hour National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQs) for Nitrogen Dioxide which is a seriously harmful pollutant and a major greenhouse gas. NRG hired a consulting firm that argued on their behalf that it won't exceed the standards because three generators are unlikely to start up all at once. But that scenario seems likely to this writer because that is the reason for the existence of these generators. To start quickly when they are needed. The Energy Commission has yet to rule on the issue.

On August 13 NRG held a very nice event for residents and the Energy Commission. There was a plant site visit and an informational meeting with an hors d'oeuvres spread that included figs in endive. Only 3 residents living near the plant spoke at the meeting--myself, my husband and our next door neighbor's daughter. Without neighborhood participation NRG will do whatever it wants to maximize profits and the energy Commission will have no way to learn the concerns of affected residents.

If you can and if you care please get involved.



the businesses would otherwise fund themselves, then more power to them. As the CEO recently wrote in the Beach Reporter: “[W]e are a business advocacy organization and look to serve the interests of the business community.” The businesses certainly will support their CEO in getting his salary paid by someone other than them.

It is instead the Council needs to be scrutinized for their decision, and what they have bought into. As David Lesser said about last year’s funding (although it did not stop him supporting it): “Council has a fiduciary obligation based on the \$75,000 contract awarded to the chamber,” he said. “How do you measure results ... beyond just stimulating activity? What is the monetary benefit to the city as a whole?” To which the Chamber CEO responded: “the plan is more long term, so the actions will not generate immediate income.” Perhaps the CEO’s response was genuine, but to me it borders on sophistry, being so incredibly vague and unaccountable one wonders about the value of the statement at all.

Funding Our Own Demise. There are other aspects of the Chamber’s basic orientation that should be brought to the front, for such orientation seems oblivious of any real concern for city residents.

For instance, in a letter attached to the Staff Report to the City Council, the Chamber actually said:

“The Chamber is seeking an additional investment of \$100,000 to drive greater economic development in the community. That is less than the Fab Lab is seeking for a program that generates no tangible financial return.”

I am no fan of the Fab Lab, but this statement obviously reflects the Chamber’s higher priority on their own well-being than the City actually funding something for the benefit of its residents. Further, I find it reprehensible for the City to functionally pay Chamber staff to lobby against a City program in favor of their own interests. Similar also to the way the Chamber CEO attends the recent Strategic Planning meeting for residents to argue for more “business friendly” activities, where the rest of the participants are in a non-professional, volunteer capacity.

Continue page 11

City Hall Update: Meeting Management.

In order to facilitate effective meeting management, Council directed staff to provide an updated report for later discussion. A meeting to discuss general meeting management procedure was subsequently held on August 13, 2013. During the eight hours’ close encounter, items discussed included Start Time, Scope of Audience participation, Time limits, Consent Calendar, Open Government, Agenda changes....

What was notable about the day’s proceedings was the level of council professionalism, the quality of suggestions generated and recommendations discussed. The goal was to focus on resident-driven rather than council-driven, and for most of the proceedings that was accomplished. The members reached consensus on many issues, agreed to postpone others for further discussion, and what was generated was a perception of five responsible officials, addressing the issues with clarity and honesty and an openness less apparent in the more formal council meetings. Anyone watching the interaction learned something about the participants, even as Council learned how to deal with a meeting structure inherited from previous councils.

Details of changes and actions will be made available to the public at Council’s October 1st meeting with a draft resolution proposing and incorporating a number of changes discussed. A brief reference to some of these follows:

..The Agenda will be posted by Wednesday noon.

..Rules of Decorum were passed and will be posted

..There was a title change: the Public Participation title was changed to ‘Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters. (Because this often continues towards the end of the meeting, the second session reference will be ‘Public Participation.)

..Discussion about possible Agenda changes after being posted led to a prolonged exchange of views. Mayor Pro Tem Howorth felt that in flexibility vs. public accessibility, the former was more important and that those interested in an issue will attend. Opposing views spoke of inconvenience to those who had to make arrangements in advance; the issue required further discussion.

..Extended discussion on Consent Calendar: directions were given to the city attorney to come back with suggestions about items difficult to define and the mechanism of ‘pulling’ an item; also, that no policies be placed on the Consent Calendar, and a vote was made to return to what had been a previous process and residents now may once again be first to ‘pull’ an item...

...The main issues were: Meeting Management, Time Management; Efficiency, and Council spent considerable time considering each.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to: Open Government Initiatives. Council discussed the previous Ad Hoc meetings; the items put into the Matrix; there was some discussion about coming back with some future initiatives dealing with the Sunshine Ordinance; engaging the public, and how to become more transparent

...Broadcasting capabilities at Joslyn Center and the Conference Room will be implemented in March, 2014.

...A stated problem was that Public Engagement was not put on the Matrix and there was discussion of a need for dialogue and deliberations.

.. A stated goal was to follow through with developing a protocol related to public Engagement

...Reference also to move forward on: Open Government, Brown Act, Public Records Act

...Council spoke about Strategic Planning and Policy building

-----All of the above are brief references to subjects introduced and discussed with five councilmembers working to reach agreement in an effort to revise and improve the team structure. No action was taken on a number of subject areas. Everything will come back to Council and residents with an agendaized report that gives a description of what was accomplished during the August 13 meeting.

E.B.



We're On the Clock

Time has been measured by hourglass, a water clock, marked by a candle's flame burning down, pendulums and the atomic clock. The who and how of Council's recent time-controlled process will have to be determined.

A decision made at the August 13, 2013, Management Meeting was to impose a 15 minute total time limit on each (not Council) speaker. A suggested 9-minute limit was not considered; the 15-minute limit was voted on with a 4-1 majority, Mayor Lesser dissenting. Public Hearings are excluded in this time accounting; the process will be initiated on a trial basis.

One Councilperson's suggestion that this would lead to greater efficiency in meeting management was viewed by some residents with a degree of skepticism. It is acknowledged that a very limited number of residents use the podium as an ongoing forum for personal views; however, a writer of an earlier Observer article expressed his opinion about Public Access and Council's passing of Resolution 4598, which limited the time allowed speakers coming before Council.

At the time, he said, the Resolution was slipped in, not to combat the amount of time speakers were taking, but because of the content of what they were saying. "The Brown Act," he added, "required cities to pass a resolution if they want to put time limits on how long they want members of the public to speak."

This current Council, much improved from earlier draconian ones, has expressed greater willingness to encourage audience participation...but the perception for some residents will be one of dissatisfaction with the proposed time constraints, which, they state, will discourage their coming before council. The ticking of the clock will be a deterrent.

Asked why he had voted No, Mayor Lesser spoke of two concerns:

First, he wondered how, logistically, the city clerk could keep track of each speaker, adding that as mayor, he would be opposed to maintaining that account because it would mean having to keep track of what someone was saying as opposed to listening to the content. Mechanically, the process would be too challenging.

More importantly, however, he stated, is that "I just think it sent the wrong message... to the extent we are trying to encourage people to come down," it would be wrong to put a limitation on the total time in which they can speak, particularly if there are more than one important matters on the agenda.

Mayor Lesser is aware that he is often faced with one resident's numerous and lengthy appearances during one meeting, but "it is one of the costs of public proceedings we are adopting." Lesser, while admitting he is not eager to hear 45 minutes of ranting, nonetheless asserts this is the right of the individual and "is part of what we have to deal with." It is hoped the tool of Rules of Decorum will help eliminate whatever becomes offensive.

The proposed 15-minute time frame will come before council as a Resolution; audience members will have an opportunity to speak (3 minutes or less); and some staff person will have to be appointed Time-Keeper.

E.B.

July, 1989: Parking Lot Changes Ordered by Coastal Commission

(a permit to expand the parking lot on the former Santa Fe railroad right-of-way was applied for by the city....but did this only after the development had already been essentially constructed...and had yet to be approved by the Coastal Commission. It was due to the vigilance of a couple of MBRA members that this violation was noted.)

The 8-1 Coastal Commission decision recommended that the Manhattan Beach Parkway between Manhattan Beach Blvd. and 15th Street had to be redesigned to meet special conditions which address public access....

25 Years of Community Service

Jan Dennis

The Manhattan Beach Residents Association, an all-volunteer organization, was formed in the summer of 1988. The 'Observer', the organization's newsletter, was started in September of that same year.

The purpose was and is still, to-day, to bring to its members both sides of the story regarding city business; to help residents in the community find solutions to some of the issues and changes in their areas; to preserve the residential character and quality of neighborhoods and local businesses; to provide information and education to the residents; and to encourage broader participation in city government.

The Association has sponsored numerous community meetings on a variety of subjects, has researched issues for many residents and businesses coming into the community, and sent out flyers addressing special topics related to given items.

The members of MBRA receive the newsletter containing comments and opinions from members, editorials, as well as bringing current information relating to city issues. The editor of the Observer encourages people to address any questions, suggestions or issues they would like MBRA to pursue. MBRA members are striving to create a balanced environment and quality of life in an ever changing community.

Anyone interested in participating in the organization or joining the board, please send an email to: Your MBRA@gmail.com or phone (310) 379-3277.

MBRA Keeping a Careful Watch

A City Staff recommended solution to a planned construction hampered by a construction issue, was to alter the General Plan by changing the R-1 to C-2....Staff called the zoning change necessary "to correct a mapping error". However, a MBRA member found that "staff-recommended zoning changes were buried amongst several routine actions on a Council agenda" and that a portion of the property was zoned R-1. This discovery saved a residential lot from commercial use.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
25 Years of Service

**MANHATTAN BEACH
RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION**

Dick May

Living Next to a Construction Zone

Jane Guthrie

I have owned a house on 23rd Place for over 30 years. For 15 or so years of that time, I have rented the little house as work required me to be closer to LA. But recently, I have been thrilled to be able to return to my charming, family-friendly Manhattan Beach.

Imagine my surprise, when I had to watch the 1904 cottage at 2315 Alma (around the corner) get smashed to smithereens. Followed quickly by a massive fiasco of an engineering project begun to erect a 16-foot deep basement on a half lot with almost no easement. And what, to an outsider, appeared to have had little planning or engineer know-how expended on how to construct such a deep hole in a pile pure, white virgin sand.

My neighbor, Dr. Grant, did a wonderful job of describing the process:

Over three months has been spent attempting to put in shoring for a basement foundation for a small 1/2 lot build. A sixteen foot hole had to be dug. To do that steel shoring was required. First a month long attempt to drill through unexpected hard-pack naturally failed. I am told the engineer did not drill deep enough in the core sample to find the hard-pack. Then high pressure water was used to excavate drill holes, a noisy and dirty process in and of itself. 24 I beams were placed, but of course it was still not deep enough, so we suffered again when they had to be pounded in. Indeed 'pounded in' is not an appropriate description of the method they used to force these foreign objects into the dense sand. They literally put a heavy weight on the I beams and metal plate spacers between the beams, and vibrated them into the ground. An unbearably noisy process which caused the entire neighborhood to shake like mini earthquakes. Upwards of 60 pieces of metal were vibrated into the earth. Some pieces took a full day of work to place.

He didn't, however, mention the dozens of days our water turned brown (full of sand) because the construction crew was using the City hydrant to power the high-pressure water need to drill the holes for those 24 beams.

It has been a very long and disturbing three months in this neighborhood. And we don't even know what kind of permanent damage has been done to our homes, chimneys and the surrounding water and gas utilities. Why was this project allowed to be built on such a tiny lot, so amazingly close to homes on each side (less than 5 feet from one neighbor's chimney)?

Now we understand that the City Council is reviewing plans for a gigantic new project at 2320 Alma. Three lots across the street from this site, on a fairly steep, very sandy hill with the same geology that has been blamed for the trouble on the 2315 project.

How can this be?

A 5,000 square foot basement in the very same ground. Not to mention an 11,000 square foot home, swimming pool and pool house below. All for one owner. Where does the charming, livable family-friendly community fit in these plans?

- 1) *I was under the impression that based on the character and city counsel policy that mega mansions were to be discouraged in Manhattan Beach*
- 2) *I suspect that the parcels have been divided up so as to gain height advantage for the purposed residence on the upper lots. That structure will have unobstructable views even if they do not fudge on the height.*
- 3) *I worry that the damage that has been done to the neighbor's homes (chimneys, three-degree lean in floors, doors that don't close or open and God knows what kind of structural damages yet to be discovered) will not be repaired before another even bigger construction project is begun in the same geological environment. And their homes will not be able to withstand the vibrations caused by constructing a new 5,000 foot basement.*

And most importantly:

4) How does the city plan to prevent another fiasco with all the stress and damage caused by the inept and negligent practices we continue to encounter during the basement construction at 2315 Alma?

5) Isn't it time to limit the depth of basements in the Sand section? Say 5-feet maximum depth?



Back to the Future....*John S. Scott* 25th Anniversary

After all of these years of questioning, confronting and debate with our local officials do we still find our organization in a position of relevance? Is it still necessary to challenge our government's decisions as it effects the lives of its citizenry? These are questions that are resounding on the national level as well. In truth, they are underlining the attitude of complacency or the abdication of civic responsibility as having no sanction in a democratic society. The need for vox populi has never been stronger.

While democracy does not always insure the strongest leadership it is designed to balance the extremes by a system that permits the populist voice to be heard. It is this integral element that accommodates the will of the people so they may chart their own destiny.

Grass roots organizations such as the MBRA have often appeared to elected civil servants as the proverbial "thorn in the side". "If they would just let us do the job for which we were elected" is not an unfamiliar cry. However, when the single cry of the resident is muffled or lost when it is deemed an irritant or hindrance to the agendas proposed by government then there must be redress.

Diversity of opinion has always been a characteristic of a free society, but only when it is allowed to meet at the table of understanding and compromise does it gain strength.

Looking back we can be justifiably proud of the impact the organization has had on the development of these four square miles we know as Manhattan Beach.

Congratulations MBRA for continuing to inform, to offer a platform for the individual voice and to help guide our unique residential community into the future.



February, 1989: Refuse Fee Questioned

Questions about additional monthly rates charged Manhattan Beach residents for refuse pickup has produced interesting, even startling, facts.

Since September, 1983, the City has imposed and collected an undisclosed administrative charge....

(This is the first of MBRA's pursuit to inform the residents while continuing to question various city officials to acknowledge this charge. I took twenty years, but our persistence finally resulted in the additional charge noted on our refuse bill. The item continues, however; despite a name change, the issue is not resolved: MBRA continues to question the amount billed and urges a full accounting of the numerous items packaged into this specific charge.)

Shoring Solutions Sought

(Recognizing the disruption to residents' quality of life caused by construction shoring, Building Official Sal Kaddorah mentioned the extended efforts to find a better way for this phase of construction. The following is a reprint of an Observer article printed in September, 2006, written by a resident experiencing the impact described by those who spoke on the same issue during the August 6, 2013, City Council meeting.)

As a writer and film maker who works at home, Manhattan Beach resident Veronica Zelle has had to work late at night because of the daily neighborhood construction noise. This requires getting some sleep in the morning hours, a need often denied her because of the early hours nearby construction begins.

Zelle understands the houses will be built and there will be resulting inconvenience, but she feels there should be recognition and consideration for people with home offices. Her specific concern is the issue of shoring. Currently a home across the street will require the shoring during which, she said, "for two weeks I won't be able to work out of my home; I won't be able to earn a living and I feel there should be some compensation for the time I cannot work." The huge girders being pounded into the ground create a noise so loud it directly impacts the ability to concentrate and work.

Working out of one's home, she says, creates a better lifestyle, but wonders whether it means living in a city that almost prohibits this. She emphasized that she can take the hammering and the sawing but the shoring and the fact that one's house literally shakes from the pounding leave her nowhere to go.

Zelle pointed out that as a film maker, as someone who shoots in neighborhoods, if she wanted to bring a production to this city there are rules to which she must adhere. She says she could not come in before 8:00 a.m. and could not park any vehicles in the neighborhood, but must shuttle in. Also, she must make sure that every homeowner in the neighborhood signs off and says it is OK for the film crew to be there--- film crew, she adds, that doesn't come close to creating the noise made by construction.

In a previous Manhattan Beach shoot, Zelle said she adhered to all the rules, even arranged for hotel rooms for some of the neighbors and all with minimal impact. She would like some of the same rules applied to construction sites.

Shoring, she states emphatically, is loud and obstructive. Some accommodation to the residents in the neighborhood who are directly impacted by the noise and inconvenience should be made.



(One of the first undergrounding attempts was noted in an article in May, 1989):

Undergrounding Issue Not Buried

...Approval on April 11 of the undergrounding of utilities in a pilot district of Manhattan Beach, was a decision which disturbed its many opponents. The Council decision was a reversal of its earlier 3-2 vote on February 14 to abandon the project...

(in response to requests from residents for information about MBRA's history, in this issue we are printing brief resumes of (a) Its origins, (b) Its goals and projection, and (c) The Observer)

Why We Are

by John Scott

It was during a prolonged period of change and anxiety, threatening and intrusive issues that Manhattan Beach Residents Association was formed. Then, as indeed now, our goals remain ever constant. They are our *raison d'être*; they are the foundation upon which MBRA evolved, worked, responded and grew.

Twenty-five years ago residents of this small beach community were beginning to feel disenfranchised by their local government. Many complained that grievances were not being heard and information was not adequately forthcoming. What was sadly lacking was thoughtful response, fact-finding opinions, attentive listening to residents, decisions made only after all views and concerns had been expressed, and most significantly, avoiding even the faintest perception of predetermined decisions, actions, recommendations. The Manhattan Beach Residents Association (MBRA) and its membership publication, the Observer, were born, recognizing the importance of vigilance based on adequate information and the significance of our shared conviction that: we are part of a whole, that what affects one area, affects us all.

We knew we would not be complacent about integrity or about unfair or uninformed decisions made by City Hall. We would not accept anything less than a fully responsive and representative Council, Commissions and Staff. When you settle for less, less is what you get.

The Association was formed in the summer of 1988. The purpose was to help the residents of Manhattan Beach find solutions to issues and changes in their neighborhoods. The goals were—and remain:

- . To maintain Manhattan Beach as a residential community
- . To preserve the residential character and quality of its neighborhoods and local businesses
- . To provide information and education to the residents of the community
- . To encourage broader participation in city government
- . To support candidates and efforts to further the objectives of the organization

Grass roots organizations such as the MBRA have often appeared to elected civil servants as the proverbial “thorn in the side”. However, when a single cry of a resident is muffled or lost when it is deemed an irritant or hindrance to the agendas proposed by government, then there must be redress.

As an all-volunteer organization we remain committed to question, present, inform and engage in meaningful exchanges with government offices of Manhattan Beach as they affect the quality of life in this unique seaside municipality.

From its beginnings, residents facing issues and changes in their respective areas which they deem threatening and intrusive, were urged to contact MBRA for support and assistance. To this end we helped enlighten, make changes, find solutions—and this commitment remains in effect today.

It has always been the mission of MBRA to let its members know there are other sides to the important issues of the day, and it has steadfastly pursued the goal of presenting the unvarnished facts—giving residents the opportunity to make their own judgments. The job of MBRA is to promote awareness, make issues more transparent, and give the residents an alternative voice. Indeed, the mission continues. After all, that is what we are!

The Voice of the Observer

Former New York City Senator Patrick Moynihan stated “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion; everyone is not entitled to his own facts.”

Beginning with our first September, 1988 Observer issue, we endeavored to present articles which contained verifiable facts; to these, however, we added opinion, fact-based and personal, relating to content.

It was not our intention to put out a paper just to print bland community announcements; rather, we recognized and responded to a growing apparent need expressed by the many residents who sought a representative voice, one which lent credibility and strength and support to individual and community issues.

In that earlier time frame residents told us they often felt intimidated or ignored when appearing before that council. They sometimes felt subjected to draconian measures which they found embarrassing and arrogant and which served to discourage resident participation. And so they welcomed a Manhattan Beach Residents Association which shared their concerns, understood the inherent difficulties, and which offered whatever expertise and research we could. To this end the Observer added its voice, one of reason and conviction.

A review of years' past issues finds a mix of articles, interviews and general information, but we also did not hesitate to point out areas about which MBRA strongly questioned Council and Commission decisions. The Observer did more than observe: we questioned, helped effect changes, won some causes, lost some, applauded as well as opposed city actions and recommendations.

Was there any negative response to our many articles during the ensuing years. Of course. We take no advertising and are therefore responsible only for presenting members' views and to comment on city-wide issues which frequently do not appear in our local weeklies.

In the process we earned some less than benign labels. I say “earned” because we did not hesitate to stand firmly against what was viewed as irresponsible community development projects. Only in talking about nothing can we be sure not to arouse any controversy.

If what the Observer sometimes provided was controversial, it was because we were shaking up the status quo, where a 5-0 vote was the desired testimony to unanimity. Still, we were successful in making our point. We were serving the residents' need to learn more about city-wide issues, furthering an MBRA goal to ‘provide information and education to the residents of the community’. Controversy can have positive results.

The Observer strives to create an effective voice in maintaining a balance in the quality of life in our neighborhoods. It is the voice of, by and for Manhattan Beach residents.

It will continue on the road it undertook in 1988: to reflect our members' views, facts and opinions, even when those whose motive we question refer to us as ‘dissenters’.

Our response to this is “Dissent is what reduces Democracy from a quiet death behind closed doors”.

The Observer will continue to keep those informational doors open. It will continue to try even harder to retain its integrity and purpose. It will continue to be our collective voice—and it will continue to be heard.

E.B.

In still another presentation, the Chamber touted the advantage of forming Business Improvement Districts, because BID formation “removes the Brown Act requirement”—again working against resident interests in open meetings. In this same presentation the Chamber said it will use the money to explore strategies such as a reduction in city tax for a period, and the easing of business restrictions—both items which are in place to benefit residents.

And the Chamber is not stopping there. The Chamber is also proposing an increase in the City’s Transient Occupancy Tax (“bed tax”) rate to fund a “Hospitality BID.” TOT revenue is often cited as one of the best sources to fund our administrative and recreational facility needs—which the residents themselves would need to fund with a separate tax from their own pocket if such money was diverted elsewhere.

A March 2012 Beach Reporter article discussed how Shade Hotel/Zislis Group management, along with the president of the Manhattan Beach Lodging Association, met with city officials to discuss creating a tourism business improvement district to better market Manhattan Beach to tourists, with the funding from a 1 to 1.5% TOT increase. The Chamber CEO, in a more recent Beach Reporter column, continued to call for some level of additional TOT dedicated to a “Hospitality BID”, to increase 20% annually for the first 5 years. [Note: a 1% increase in the TOT would generate over \$300,000 annually.]

That funding a Hospitality BID becomes competitive with one of our most available sources of additional funding for basic city services can be discerned from the City Manager’s recent budget message:

“If capital needs are considered along with service level demands, it is clear that the City should consider opportunities to grow its revenue base. Possible options include an increase in the transient occupancy tax (which may be accomplished without voter approval and would generate new revenue of approximately \$780,000).”

How Much More, for How Much More? But is there any real reason for any of this funding? Economically, Manhattan Beach does pretty well. As City Controller Henry Mitzner said on our City’s economy in an April 2013 Beach Reporter article: “When it’s good out there, it’s great here. When it’s bad out there, it’s good here.” Per the City’s 2013/2014 budget documents, annual hotel revenue subject to TOT is projected to have increased by \$12.4 million from 2011/12 actuals—all without a new Hospitality BID. When we are already doing well, to what degree do we need to be even better? Have we brought into the calculus the risk of unintended consequence of additional business, or whether or not such “growth” can be appropriately managed and contained? Isn’t there a point when additional sales (especially nightlife revenue) are quickly offset by the need for additional city services (e.g., police) or, more esoterically, are offset by a diminution of our quality of life.

City’s Shirks Responsibility. Or maybe it is just time for residents to ask why the city is not doing more on its own behalf, as does the community development group in most cities. In effect, the Council seems to be outsourcing City Hall’s own economic development responsibilities to an organization that is not as attentive to resident needs.

But it seems our Community Development Director (who received compensation of over \$200,000 in 2011, per the California State Controller’s Website), wants no part of that action, since he believes the business community can provide for itself, as per the following quote from an October 2011 Planning Commission meeting:

"Director Thompson commented that many cities have economic development staff that recruit businesses. He said that Manhattan Beach has plenty of real estate brokers who look for the right fit for the available sites. He indicated that the vacancy rate along Sepulveda Boulevard is very low. He commented that he does not feel an economic development department is necessary for the City."

A Modest Proposal. My counter proposition is that if the City has identified a need for currently absent resident-serving businesses (such as a hardware store) or one that will generate significant revenue with little impact (like an auto dealership), we should be equipped to pursue using our own resources or contract with someone to directly pursue such ventures

Certainly there might be an intersection of interests in respect to a Visitor’s Bureau, but if the City wants an external group to operate that function there must be more precise guidelines and controls.

With business margins of 50% or more on each incremental dollar earned, business stands to benefit significantly more from any increased business “investment” than the 1% tax gleaned by the City—which Business uses as justification for this funding (consider that \$10,000,000 of taxable sales are necessary for the city to just break even with a \$100,000 expenditure). Frankly, if such economic development espoused by the Chamber is such a certainty, one would think business would be falling over themselves for self-funding.

Also consider our other business subsidies already in place: Holiday meter bagging, Ocean Express, no Utility Users Tax, free Chamber office use, subsidized downtown lighting and landscaping districts, or even the city’s acquisition of the Metlox land to control competition and allow for more downtown parking. When the School District requests fair compensation for field use, City Hall trots out a full menu of other payments the District “receives” from the City. Not so when business comes knocking. It seems that business has become so emboldened with past successes that there no longer is any shame in the asking.

Instead of buying into the “long-term investment” sophistry, or that business is looking out for the needs of the residents, the city needs to focus instead on just what City Hall’s responsibility is to Business. Over the last decade, the last vestiges of City Hall funding of Chambers of Commerce have dried up. Throughout the country, most businesses say that what attracts them is great police/fire protection, great utility services, relatively low taxes and an environment where wealthy people would want to live or visit. Business is for business; City Hall should be for the residents. Let’s keep this all clean, separate, straight—and accountable.



City Hall Calendar

Sept. 3,
City Council 6:00 pm

Man. Mall project Public Hearing

Sept. 17
City Council 6:00 pm

Man. Mall project discussion, cont'd

Oct. 1
City Council 6:00pm

Protocol Council Meeting Mgt. changes come before Council for final approval

The Copy Shop, at 309 S. Sepulveda Blvd., in Manhattan Beach, has printed each Observer since its first issue in September, 1988. The unfailing professionalism and cooperation of each staff member have been instrumental in the quality and timeliness of each mailing. We extend our appreciative thanks to Adam, Leo and Barry for their continued generous help.

Our thanks to Manhattan Beach City Staff

whose generous assistance today and in past years is greatly appreciated. Accolades to Liza Tamura and those who continually prove they can complete an undertaking which others say cannot be done. They do this with considerable grace.

July 2006 Residents' Rally Rejects Undergrounding

What began as a spontaneous rally to express opposition to undergrounding grew to a gathering of more than 150 residents with one voice. On Tuesday, June 6, they came, many carrying signs they had hand painted, each conveying a personal message.....

September 1991 Reorganization of Council Assignments

The Observer questioned the manner in which some council delegates were appointed to various committees in which they meet to set policy, get input, express a point of view representing the people of this city; they reflect the voice of the residents who elected them. When a Reorganization chart listed the names of some staff members, not elected officials, to represent the residents, the issue was brought before council and a more representative change was made.

(An undergrounding proponent's offer of \$80,000. to donate to his district's preliminary engineering costs was the source of a Dec., 2006 Editorial....) ...Two thousand years ago 30 pieces of silver was the price of betrayal. In today's economy \$80,000 was the significant price.....

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Manhattan Beach, CA 90267-1149
(310) 379-3277 Email: yourmbra@gmail.com

Enclosed is \$30.00 annual (2013-2014) Membership Fee.

Yes, I (we) would like to assist.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephoning |

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