

The Manhattan Beach Observer

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Missed Alignment – Why and How We Need to Approach Large Project Funding

By Gary Osterhout

Three recent City events form a template for determining where we want to go as a community and how we want to pay for it: a recent Council study session on the storm water/streetlight funds, the four new recently approved city positions, and the ULI evaluation of downtown.

Streetlights/Stormwater Fees. On January 15, the Council held a special study session concerning the shortfall in these budgetary funds. Many decades ago, Manhattan Beach residents voted to assess themselves separately for these services. There was no requirement to separately fund and carve these districts away from regular city expenditures, but residents chose to do so. Some cities fund these services out of their general fund without assessing the residents, as our city did prior to that action.

In the past decade, these separate funds have not generated sufficient money from assessments to meet their full costs. But to raise the assessments the City would have to receive sufficient property owner approval through a “Prop. 218” vote of property owners (probably by mail-in ballot). Trouble is, a recent survey funded by the City suggests that if the City went to a vote, the fee increase would fail even the ballot measure asked for less of a tax increase than was needed.

Eye-opening, though, is that around 20% to 23% of those surveyed would not support the measure “because the City cannot be trusted and/or will mismanage the funds.”

New, Approved Positions. On October 7, 2014, the Council approved four new positions with combined salaries and benefits that could easily reach the \$1 million mark annually (considering pensions, raises, bonuses, and step and grade changes). Council approval came just a few months after hiring an Assistant City Manager (an unfilled position for many years), bringing on a full-time graphic designer, and giving a Revenue Services Manager a

COUNCIL CANDIDATE FORUM TO BE HELD

Manhattan Beach Residents Association, through the generous assistance of City Manager Danaj and staff, will once again sponsor a Manhattan Beach Council Candidate Forum. It will be held on Thursday, February 12th, 2015, from 7:00-8:00 p.m. in City chambers. Sandra Seville-Jones will preside as moderator.

Residents are invited to attend this live broadcast, which will be viewed on public access tv, channels 8 and 35, and will be repeated on subsequent days until election date.

Time and days of the rebroadcast will be announced the evening of the Forum.

Residents may submit questions they would like presented to candidates by emailing to:

Yourmbra@gmail.com or
phone (310) 379-3277.
Questions must be in on or before February 8th. As many as time permits will be included.



At the conclusion of his rotation as Manhattan Beach City Mayor at the February 2, 1993 Council meeting, Dan Stern addressed this issue and shared his views on the dangers of politicians whose standard is influenced by special interests. The importance of his speech, the integrity which shaped his expressed thoughts, are reprinted

Politicians Are Not Always Leaders

...by Dan Stern

...The thrust of my thesis is:
Politicians are not always leaders.

We seem both locally and globally to be breaking into an ever larger number of factions. That used to work, but it doesn't anymore.

We've got factions lobbying for:

- Funding for favored activities or programs
- Lobbying for tax breaks
- Lobbying for variances from codes and rules
- Lobbying their positions on individual vs. collective rights.

It used to work because representatives balanced the requests, said 'Yes' to some and 'No' to others. But that was the era of balanced budgets and balanced democracy.

The new technique is 'Yes' to everyone -

Yes to special purpose groups and followers

Yes to expenditures even if they are not fiscally sound or deficit spending

Yes to exceptions to rules or codes whether they are a tax code or building code

Yes to balconies, condos, parking structures

Folks say 'Yes' because it provides supporters and supporters are voters.

...It's Okay for politicians to want votes as long as we remember that - **POLITICIANS DO NOT EQUATE LEADERSHIP.**

A political machine can deliver votes, but not necessarily a successful future.

Let me tell you my analysis of short vs. long views:

Suppose there is a street with 30x90 lots, trees, and single family residences. Each lot or

house has a value. If one owner cuts trees down and builds two separate homes on that 30x90 lot (condo's), he or she makes some money, the developer makes a lot of money, and the real estate agents sell two, not one house. The street is still fine. The tax roll increases for the city - (as does the density and demand for service) - It's a win for several people.

Now what happens if, over the years, most people on the block do the same. What was once characterized as a charming little tree-lined street of 15 houses on a side, now has 30 houses on a side. The desirability of the street is gone. It's the long term view that's different from the short term.

That's why areas that want to maintain long term values don't allow overdevelopment.

Most of us own property - We all want it to increase in value. We are all doing the best we can. I think the difference is long term vs. short term set of goals.

Charles Darwin said:

The first requisite of civilization is that of justice - that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favor of an individual. This implies nothing as to the ethical value of such a law.

So my view is we're suffering from a shortening of horizons. We really need to get out of the "Me 80's" and into the "Us 90's" - **BECAUSE POLITICS AND POLITICIANS AND HIDDEN AGENDAS AND A QUICK RETURN AND A PROMISE OF FUTURE CAMPAIGN SUPPORT IS NOT CONDUCTIVE TO LEADERSHIP.**

This view is not an original

problem or situation. Plato, writing in the **Republic**, warned about politicians and said:

...the truth is that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager, the worst.

I'd like to go back to the idea that politicians need votes and some are willing to make deals and say 'Yes'. Special interests need favors that go beyond justice and are willing to make deals and deliver votes. When that happens, it's not a pretty picture.

For my last quote, Teddy Roosevelt addressed a specific special interest in this way:

...Our government, national and state, must be freed from the sinister influence or control of special interests...We must drive the special interests out of politics. That is one of our tasks today. Every special interest is entitled to justice - full, fair, and complete. ...Every special interest is entitled to justice, but not one is entitled to a vote in Congress, to a voice on the bench, or to representation in any public office.

Teddy Roosevelt was concerned that the people's representative serve the **people** who have **delegated** their power and that the representatives not be influenced by compensation or support from special interests. For me, that is a very real concern and the crux of separation between politics and leadership.



Editor's Column

In this space we often expressed the sentiment that residents expect a code of ethics exhibited by elected officials which does more than merely comply with the law. The word 'ethics' itself indicates a higher standard. It is with the expectation of a higher standard that we view our public officials. There should be no cause to wonder if a decision benefits political interest for that specific purpose.

At the conclusion of his rotation as Manhattan Beach City Mayor at the February 2, 1993 council meeting, Dan Stern addressed this issue and shared his views on the dangers of politicians whose standard is influenced by special interests. The importance of his speech, the integrity which shaped his expressed thoughts, are reprinted on Page 2.

There are those who may have read the speech in previous Observer issues. Certainly, it has been printed prior to each City Council election through the ensuing years. It is for the many for whom this will be a first read that we print it now, and hope to continue doing this as long as the message resonates with the clarity and depth of its vision and values.

Dan Stern's speech may well be considered required reading, particularly prior to an election, national or local.

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YOUR VOTE COUNTS
City Council election on
March 3rd, 2015

City Council Report Card

For Report Card	Burton	D'Errico	Howorth	Lesser	Powell
Award contract to explore Skatepark Possible sites					
Approve water feature encroachment in public right of way Appeal					
Receive design status update on Sep. Blvd. Bridge Widening Project					
Adopt Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Budget Policies					



Vote: YES



Vote: NO

If we are going to keep the beautiful solvent City of Manhattan Beach, then we can't each place our own personal needs above the community needs, and we can't go back to the old model of city politics where a few businessmen make the decisions for the whole city. The idea that "What's good for General Motors is good for America" is dead at both the national and local level.

So the people-in our case, residents and business alike - must decide whether they are interested in the long term health and then whether they're willing to put the time and energy into achieving the long term success.

We, the people, are accountable for our societies' results. That's good news. In fact, it's great news, and one of the blessings of democracy. For democracy teaches all of us to be accountable for our decisions.

While I've said Politicians are not identical to, nor do they automatically provide Leadership - they (or we) can. So my view is we need politicians who are leaders.

Some things that leaders do or are:

- Leaders provide goals
- Long term vision and strategy
- They can say "No"
- They can say "No" even to groups who offer to deliver a block of votes, even when it's unpopular

- Leaders who support the accomplishments of group purpose (this purpose need not be lofty; it can be the pier rehabilitation or a charity lunch)
- They affirm values
- They motivate and manage
- Leaders operate from an open agenda

It's important not to confuse leadership

- with status
- with membership in a bureaucracy
- with Power
- with Authority (a policeman or woman with a gun has authority; he or she may or may not be a leader)

Leaders deal in investment Politicians deal in deficit

It's not rhetoric because it's about long term benefit and return.

Your burden is to choose and support leaders, even when they say No to you, and that's not easy.

We have to keep our eye on the Goals, Tactics, Results.

Any one or even two is not enough. When you examine someone for public office and trust, it needs to be all three:

Goals
Tactics
Results



Amy Howorth

By Michelle Murphy

Amy Howorth has served Manhattan Beach in an elected capacity for the last 12 years and she is now asking the electorate for four more years. She seems to like her work. She was first elected to serve on the MB Unified School District Board in 2003 and was reelected in 2007. She was president of the School Board twice and then she resigned in order to run for City Council. She was elected to Council in 2011 and served as mayor from 2013 to 2014. In February 2014, Howorth announced her candidacy for a California Senate seat. She was endorsed by Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi, Congresswoman Janice Hahn, LA Mayor Richard Riordan, Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe and former Manhattan Beach Mayor Richard Montgomery among others. She lost the Democratic primary and then supported Ben Allen who won the seat.

Howorth says running for State Senate has made Howorth a more effective council member. She believes that the people she met and the connections with agencies and organizations she made while running for higher office will be very helpful in serving Manhattan Beach over the next four years should she be reelected.

Howorth grew up in Ohio and attended Ohio University (1982-1986) where she earned her BS Degree in Telecommunications, with minors in French and Political Science. After school she worked as a photo librarian and editor for a Public Television station in Boston. When she moved to the Bay Area she worked as the original photo editor for Wired Magazine. She is now a 17 year resident of Manhattan Beach, where she lives with her husband Mark and two sons Ari and Jack. Her husband sometimes talks about moving back to Northern California and Howorth tells him it will have to be with his second wife because she is happily settled in Manhattan Beach.

While she was mayor, Howorth's proudest accomplishments were passing the Breathe Free Manhattan Beach public smoking ban and extending the ban on polystyrene and plastic bags. Howorth is also proud that both while on the School Board and as a Council member she has sometimes had to make hard decisions that didn't please everyone. About her recent vote to allow 2 ½ story parking at the soon to be expanded Village Mall, Howorth said: "I feel comfortable with the designs I saw...They seem attractive and safe...I didn't want the perfect to get in the way of the good."

David Lesser

By Esther Besbris

When a copy of his Observer 2007 candidate interview was shown to David Lesser with the request that he review what was written and indicate what changes or additions he would suggest, his edit was remarkably brief. Other than correcting a misprint in the stated Commissions in which he had served, what was written then could be repeated now. His expressed statements and views in 2007 defined the essence of the character and commitment of David Lesser of today.

He is "A long time resident who deeply cares about our community. I plan to live here for along time and am not in this looking for higher office. I am in this because I want to do more, to see policy ideas perhaps implemented....I am willing to ask questions of staff, redirect discussions and build consensus among other members."

He said that in 2007 and reaffirms it now.

Asked to define a priority if reelected, Lesser spoke of his ongoing interest in fiscal responsibility. His was the lone dissenting vote when four positions which would have cost \$847,000. annually, were approved. He explained his opposing response was because of the process standpoint, as well as the substantive standpoint. He was concerned about the money involved and frustrated because whatever the problems they were trying to solve had not been defined. Beyond that, he added, "It was the process with regard to engaging the community and the major case for why the four positions were warranted and needed."

In his approach to fiscal responsibility he will request more robust presentations on certain issues and a better understanding of the total budget, with more information needed to be flushed out.

Getting information out is important, he emphasized. He spoke of the existing need to improve our revenue stream to be able to build an infrastructure to contain the stormwater. But..." he continued, "we need to see how we can afford to pay for some of these."

Lesser spoke of the Urban Land Institute panel and the meetings with the stakeholders. He wonders whether all the improvements discussed by ULI could be justified by increasing our tax revenue and feels that "We really have to find why we are going to do this and while some things are worth spending public funds well beyond the tax generating capability, what do you take on and how do you prioritize...."

What is most important..This is something we really will need to talk about, not just among ourselves at council but we need more public

Bill Victor

by Michelle Murphy

Bill Victor is the only non-incumbent running for a City Council seat. He tried his best to talk someone else into running because he knew there would be no election at all if only the two incumbents ran for the two open seats and he believes that elections and debates on issues are essential elements of a working democracy. Questions about where Manhattan Beach is headed are especially important right now as we make decisions about development that will shape our town for long into the future.

When no one else filed papers, Victor decided he would have to run so at the very last minute he scrambled to complete the paperwork including registering to vote from his West Coast home instead of the Long Island home where he had lived off and on since he was 6 months old. If that makes it sound like Victor is a carpetbagger who only recently arrived in Manhattan Beach nothing could be further from the truth. Since the late 70's when a wrong turn while leaving the airport led him fortuitously to this town and to an instant love affair with Manhattan Beach, Victor has been a political voice on almost all the issues of importance in our town. He bought property here in 1980 and has lived here on and off since, often traveling between the east and west coasts as work and family necessitated.

Bill Victor ran for City Council before in 1990 and lost. He hopes to win this time so he can continue to work on what has been his avocation for more than 30 years—trying to make Manhattan Beach a better place.

Victor graduated from Brown and got his law degree at Brooklyn Law School. He has practiced in many areas of the law on both coasts including intellectual property law employment, environmental and even, on occasion, criminal law. He is licensed to practice in both California and New York and has worked in corporations and large firms as well as on his own and he says he has loved almost every minute of his career.

Victor has many ideas for helping our town work smarter. He'd like the City to rely less on expensive consultants and more on the fellow townspeople who serve on our city commissions. Too often he thinks Council ignores the findings of the good and knowledgeable people on our Planning and other commissions. He also feels that our beach is our most precious asset and we should work more closely with the Coastal Commission to protect and preserve it.

The Urban Land Institute Wants to Destroy our Small Town in Order to Save It

By Michelle Murphy

Our City Council paid the Urban Land Institute (“ULI”) \$125,000 to speak to “stakeholders” from January 12 to 16 and tell us what to do with our downtown. ULI is a non-profit company composed of 20% of folks who work in government, academia, or public-private partnerships and 80% who work in the real estate and urban development industries. Like the old saying: “to the hammer every problem is a nail,” the development-heavy ULI’s \$125,000 answer to our downtown “problem” is that we need more development and definitely more parking. Three (oh excuse me 2 ½) story parking lots anyone?

Urban Land Institute is the same company that Redondo Beach hired in 2000. Working with ULI’s recommendations Redondo then created the Heart of the City plan to build 2,998 new housing units and 657,000 sq. feet of commercial space. Heart of the City planning cost Redondo big bucks but was rejected by residents who felt that level of development was grotesque. And that was Redondo.

In Manhattan Beach the 5 day ULI process began on Monday with the arrival of 8 experts from around the country. We could have hired a cheaper ULI Los Angeles branch and not had to pay for their cross country travel and their stay at Shade Hotel, but you know Manhattan Beach. We need to go first class all the way. On Monday they walked around the town and attended a reception that night with stakeholders and city staff.

On Tuesday they met with 123 stakeholders. Stakeholders, according to information released by the city, appear to have been a group of mostly non-residents. Instead downtown business and land owners, investors, realtors, city staff and others with “skin in the game” (to use a phrase from ULI) were the majority of “stakeholders.” I used to think a democracy was a place governed by voters, not by those who wished to make money off of the voter’s shared resources. That concept is now apparently quaint and no longer operable. To be fair, many of the realtors and investors that were consulted might also be residents but they were considered stakeholders by virtue of their monetary interest in our town not because they wanted to make it a better place to live.

On Friday ULI reported back to the town with a power point presentation at Jocelyn Center. They led off with the same line that every politician who has ever run for office in Manhattan Beach starts with, “... (everyone we talked to told us...) MB’s small town character is precious and should be protected.” Then

It was Victor who brought the City's attention to the illegal collection of street sweeping fees even before they were imposed many years ago. When the city finally agreed they were in the wrong, Victor had to work hard to convince them they needed to reimburse residents for the full 9 years of illegal fees instead of the four years they originally offered residents.

Victor recognizes that a vibrant business community requires an effective partnership between the Chamber of Commerce and the City.

He has some ideas about how to streamline our often lengthy Council meetings. He proposes moving all ceremonial functions (like recognizing and honoring contributions by citizens and valorous city employees) to one Council meeting a month which would be devoted solely to ceremonial matters. With this small adjustment the business-only Council meetings would be instantly more efficient.

Victor is especially worried about unfunded pension obligations and what they mean for Manhattan Beach's financial security. He also wonders about money being wasted by the city including the \$189,000 Council has committed for a new police armored vehicle when we already have the use of a shared armored response and rescue vehicle. He is against the militarization of municipal police forces in general and wishes Council would rethink their priorities about these kinds of expenditures. Victor believes we have a great police chief in Eve Irvine but he wishes officers emphasized safety and our protection more and writing tickets less. He would like to see more of a physical police presence downtown and at the beach.

Victor believes that the most important priorities for Manhattan Beach are the safety of our neighborhoods and preserving the continued excellence of our school district. He believes the city-school partnership should continue.

Victor promises that if elected he will not run for any other office while serving as a Council Member.



like almost every politician in town, ULI proceeded to ignore that most basic and heartfelt desire.

The gist of their recommendations are that we need more parking to service more sales downtown. We need to hire an Economic Development Manager and develop downtown. They admitted that all of their suggestions could cost hundreds of millions of dollars (according to the Beach Reporter) and they urged that we use our AAA bond rating to borrow money so we can grow our downtown economy. They suggested parking structures near Valley Ardmere and underground parking at Von's.

The only reason ULI offered for needing these expensive and radical changes to our town was that it would lessen the property tax burden on residents. Perhaps hiring out of state experts that seem not to understand how Prop 13 works in California was not the best idea.

It will come as no surprise to readers of The Observer that we at MBRA are shocked at the notion that to preserve our small town character we must spend millions to build a bigger downtown. How a small town's character can be saved by making it big seems to defy all reason yet city officials seem not to even notice the logical flaw

Mayor Powell wants to "hit the ground running" with their recommendations and City Manager Danaj says the city now needs to decide which elements of the plan fit the city and prioritize the list.

Strangely the final ULI report which was to have been issued within thirty days, has been postponed so that it will come out after the upcoming election when it will be too late to ask the candidates for Council where they stand on ULI's final findings.

ULI had some other ideas such as their assertion that the Police and Fire Facility and the about to open Library are massively large structures that are too big for the scale of our town. They were surprised at the lack of public art and green landscaping downtown. Some of these suggestions are not crazy. Making our downtown prettier and not building giant structures are sensible ideas. Borrowing lots of money so our "stakeholders" can make more money from more congestion and crime and the very real possibility that our property values will be adversely effected is a laughably bad idea.

Please let our elected representatives know what you think about more parking and more congestion downtown. We need to let our council know that the high price tag in both dollars and quality of life is not worth whatever imaginary benefit they think a bigger downtown might bring.



**Choose your candidate's seat carefully.
It will be occupied for the next four years.
Vote March 3, 2015**

In his 1993 initially proposed Neighborhood Bill of Rights, then councilman Steve Napolitano stated: The purpose of such an ordinance is obvious. It protects neighbors by letting them know what they can expect and what rights they have in regard to neighborhood construction. It protects builders by being a constant reminder to their workers as to their community responsibilities, especially when the general contractor isn't present at the site, and it encourages compliance through continued education. By providing this information and education to neighbors and builders, our community can be an even better place to live and build in.

...This farsighted move was historically significant. Since that time, some efforts have successfully been made to address residents' problems with construction. But problems remain and to address these, and what he has experienced in the relentless frequently intolerable impacts resulting from construction issues in his neighborhood, Dr. Richard MacKenzie has suggested the Declaration of Resident Rights, printed below.

Declaration of Rights of the Residents Manhattan Beach, California

Inasmuch as the present priorities and practiced mission of both the governance and administrative bodies of the City of Manhattan Beach are in deference to the stated mission (2012) of the City:

"The City of Manhattan Beach is dedicated to providing exemplary municipal services, preserving our small beach town character and enhancing the quality of life for our residents, businesses and visitors."

we, the residents, in light of the present profusion of construction activities and associated inconveniences within its 3.9 sq. mile area that are inconsistent with its mission, hereby ask affirmation and adoption of the following amendments to building/construction practices

1. There be no more than two active construction sites within a one block area
2. Hours of construction and construction-related activity during the week be restricted to 8:00 am-5:00 pm Monday-Friday and in accord with other worksites, there be no construction-related activities on Saturdays.
3. Building plans should be reviewed in accord with strict guideline that minimize obstruction of views and flow of ocean breezes to existing homes – those very elements that define Manhattan Beach as a "small beach town."
4. City, in accord with established safe subterranean building guidelines, to establish and strictly enforce rules about how deep subterranean excavation can safely be allowed in our sandy-earthquake-zone community. These rules may vary from one district to another, based on natural soil/sand characteristics of District.
5. Builders are responsible for clean-up and for restoring streets and neighboring properties to pre-construction condition or better upon completion of the project
6. Contractor will repair all damages caused to neighbors' homes due to construction. This will include cracks to drywall or stucco due to vibration and pounding. It will be the responsibility of the contractor or representative to document pre-construction condition of neighboring houses and related structures in a form mutually agreeable to both parties.
7. Noise levels generated throughout the construction process be in compliance with local, state and federal standards
8. City to inspect, insure and certify that dirt/soil is not added to any part of a site to allow illegal circumvention of height limitations
9. Contractor must have a designated representative on site to assure that worker's vehicles are not parked in the immediate construction area on a regular or daily basis.
10. All of the above rules and existing local, state and federal codes will be vigorously enforced by Manhattan Beach police and city staff.
11. That City certified architects photos of finished project be posted at the proposed site for at least 1 month prior to granting of building permit to allow for resident input re compatibility with neighborhood and community.



sizable jump in pay. While many residents decried this action and the City Manager said he would not fill the positions (currently), the positions remain approved and one was even cited in the ULI downtown visioning presentation.

ULI Downtown Visioning. On January 16, 2015, the Urban Land Institute delivered the results of their week of study on approaches to the downtown area. The ULI said there should be additional long-term plans developed, parking structures built, and improved amenities provided such as wider sidewalks, decorative elements, LED lighting, landscaping, and public art. The team found it essential that such improvements could not be done without also filling an Economic Development Manager position.

Funding sources for the above include a bond issue, a vague "other revenue sources for funding projects other than property taxes" [Utility User Fees? Increased Sales Tax? Higher Bed Tax?], forming new special revenue districts (like streetlight/landscaping), and using the Parking Fund to fund parking improvements (while also increasing parking fees).

Aligning City Values with the Budget. What caught my eye on the ULI plan that brought these three events all together was this penultimate statement:

Create a Strategic Plan that aligns city values with available resources to be used for preparing the city's budget and funding the Capital Improvement Plan.

That is the crux of our dilemma; essential but certainly a challenge. Our current capital improvement plan—especially in terms of those projects without their own revenue stream like recreational facilities--has been woefully underfunded for years compared to what is needed. And when money is received it isn't spent all that wisely.

The only dedicated money going to this fund is from an arcane formula of 15% of annual hotel transient occupancy tax (1.5% of the 10% tax); fifty cents of the per hour charge for all on-street city parking meter collections; and \$4 of each parking citation (with the exception of expired meter cites). I was told by a former councilman

Asked about the next four years, Howorth said, "I don't see bold changes." She sees a need for a specific downtown plan. Though she wouldn't want Manhattan to become Hermosa, she admires the Pier Avenue development. She intends to keep a watchful eye on the redevelopment of the Village Mall. The Sepulveda corridor needs thought and work. "'Development' is not the 'D' word for me," she said. She also would love to see Begg Pool renovated or some kind of public pool created for our town that will work for seniors and kids learning to swim as well as water polo players.

The Howorth family has two dogs and while she would personally love a dog beach, she understands that we live in a greater metropolitan community of over 10 million people and opening a dog beach in Manhattan Beach would create a dog attraction that would overwhelm our town.

Voices for and against a skate park in Manhattan Beach have been arguing for many years. Howorth predicts that the skate park issue will be solved by some combination of skate spots and/or skate dots--small space skate board areas. A Skate Dot is the smallest skateable space possible. It will support 3 to 5 users one at a time. A Skate Spot is a little larger and will support 5 to 8 users one at a time.

Howorth has no plans to run for higher office during the next four years should she be reelected.

Amy Howorth believes her extensive experience makes her a good choice for City Council. She pledges to listen to all of the residents' concerns about any issues and if she disagrees with someone at least they will know where she stands.



David Lesser...cont' d p. 4

input."

"For me," he continued, "there are other issues besides downtown. I have taken on the issue of upgrading our power capabilities; a number of residents have experienced repeated power outages and this could be quality of life issues. We need to follow up and make sure the outages really do come to more reasonable ranges."

Other areas in which he is engaged is Crime; as Neighborhood block captain he makes sure that residents are kept informed. He is also involved with the Older Adult population, determining that our facilities are kept updated and we have revenue to do all that.

Asked whether he felt he would, if reelected be entering the next four years with more to deal with than in the previous period, Lesser replied: I

that this formula was devised back in the 1990s to be sure something was being set aside for city projects, but even then the amount was recognized then as inadequate—especially when the current financial policy is to fund on a pay-as-you-go basis, with no anticipated borrowing. Although there have been recent attempts to augment the fund with additional money, in many years all that was received in the fund was the inadequate minimum. Further, most of this funding goes right to the police/fire safety facility bondholders to fund that indebtedness.

So the city does not have a history of providing for itself much in terms of capital projects funding. Instead, the City has allowed a steady increase in payroll and excessively sequestered fund reserves absent the budgetary constraints that a properly funded capital improvements program would automatically provide. Our “excellent” financial picture has been achieved at the expense of us beggaring ourselves in respect to responsible capital project funding.

Thus, we have a large number of projects with a large amount of expenditures need per a number of prior studies: Downtown; North End; Sepulveda Corridor; Veterans Parkway Master Plan, Skatepark; Swimming Pool; Senior Center; Scouthouse; and the recently proposed Mobility and Circulation Improvements. Add to this a responsible fund for maintenance and replacement of existing facilities.

Lack of Community. To compound the problem, for years City Hall has ignored that they have not created the community vision or earned the community trust to properly fund the amenities one would expect of the one of the wealthiest communities in the world.

It is certainly interesting that the recent survey revealed residents’ unequivocal mistrust in City Hall’s ability to responsibly spend money on storm water and streetlights—two rather small and distinct programs that coincide with two of resident’s main civic concerns: quality of ocean water and safety. Not that this should have been a surprise: City Hall should have known something was awry when the City was unable to pass a public safety facility bond a few months after 9/11.

Lack of Frugality. But the City did not step up to remedy that problem or even to determine its origin. With the exception brief charade of cutting back a small amount of city services during the recession (while giving an unaccountable \$500,000 gift to downtown merchants in the form of reduced parking meter fees), the City has not really shown that they are committed to frugally limiting service expenditures to the essentials--much less finding the money for our capital improvement projects that we deserve.

Lack of Salary Cost Containment. The best we received in respect to wage and pension containment after council candidates in 2011 and 2013 told us that our city salaries and pensions were “unsustainable,” was for city workers to be asked to fund more of their health costs, but were provided a raise to cover that. We are told that managers need raises because their subordinates might make more than them with overtime, then we see from the State Controller’s website that in 2013 a Manhattan Beach Fire Captain brought home almost \$300,000 in wages, plus \$66,000 in benefits, and that overtime almost equaled base pay. We are now being asked to cover four new positions, without adequate or accountable support as to why they are even needed.

The Mayor’s New Year’s “State of the City” article said that the City has yet to address “controlling potentially unsustainable skyrocketing pension costs.”

Lack of Accountability. Over the last decade, we have seen money pour out with questionable return for holiday meter bagging, a \$1 million facility strategic plan that was a total non-starter, \$1 million in city hall plaza landscaping, \$1.7 million for a loan to the current City Manager; questionable golden parachute payments to departing City Managers, \$100,000 annually to the Chamber of Commerce, or retaining, replacing or hiring questionable positions designed more to develop a constituency for the position itself than to provide anything approaching a cost/benefit to the residents. We have a full-time graphic artist and an overly produced quarterly Park and Rec guide that would best be

moved on-line.

Lack of Restraint. Most were caught off-guard when the Police/Fire facility was constructed at full cost using securitized tax receipts after the bond measure was defeated, just as much as people were surprised when the cost of that facility seemed to quickly double to the point where some were using the “Taj Mahal” comparison. We argued that the library might be better built to a smaller scale, using the excess money for library services. Instead we have the Library Commission currently trying to find a way to keep the library open on Sunday, and the ULI presentation cited the Safety Facility and Library as “out of scale to a traditional village.” Sometimes it seems the mantra for City Hall is that nothing can be done that cannot be overdone.

Lack of Transparency. We have seen “essential” reserves set up for “employee vacation accruals” or “pension stability,” just to see those reserves evaporate when there is something else City Hall wants to fund. Or, as was done in during the recession, tapping “required” reserves in our Internal Service funds (I.T. and Vehicles), instead of responsibly accruing current interdepartmental charges to mask the need for cutbacks. In fact, totally contrary to the City’s financial policies, the current five year financial forecast projects that we intend to begin sipping from the \$4 million Reserve for Economic Uncertainty, which even the last City Manager’s budget message suggests cannot be used for that way as “the City’s financial policies state that these funds are to be used only ‘in the event of significant financial emergency.’”

Lack of Integrity. The City cannot even talk straight with residents in respect to the advantages of a fee increase for the streetlight and storm water funds. The survey commissioned by the Council and conducted on their behalf falsely stated to those that were surveyed that a funding measure was already developed and in fact even articulated the arguments for and against the measure they said were already being discussed (no one had discussed this).

But even more questionable, residents were being told the money from the measures would do a bunch of great things. For the streetlight district, e.g., residents were told higher fees would “avoid reductions in street lighting services” and “replace outdated light systems with energy efficient lights that are less costly to operate and maintain and are better for the environment.”

However, it is extremely unlikely any Manhattan Beach Council would reduce lighting services or not replace with energy efficient lighting upon obsolescence regardless of funding levels. Important to understanding the funding dynamics is that there is no mandate that ONLY special revenues can be used to fund these districts. As we have done for years we can continue paying the same fees and just supplement any need with general fund monies—similar to what we would have done if these districts had never been formed.

So in effect, these fee increase measures are more so that the City Council can use the general fund money they would otherwise use for these essential lighting/stormwater services for something else. In fact, instead of Staff persuading the Council with the same approach as non-elected residents, the Staff Report stated the issue this way:

“The most salient question when considering the risks of continued subsidies [of the special funds] is this: What could the City do with \$7 million over the next five years if it wasn’t needed to support programs that by design should be self-sustaining?”

For the above is really the issue for residents: do we trust Council to efficiently spend an additional \$7 million over the next five years, and do we want to tax ourselves in this manner to create that additional spending money?

Certainly as ULI states, we need to “Create a Strategic Plan that aligns city values with available resources to be used for preparing the city’s budget and funding the Capital Improvement Plan.” However, before that gets done--or concurrent with that effort--we need City Hall to begin acting and talking to us about finances in a responsible way.

Talk Honestly and Objectively. Councilmembers and Staff can continually spout on about our AAA-rating, or our balanced-budgets or our excessively large reserves. But balanced budgets are legally mandated, and our ratings are as much because of our wealth and property values we have a huge untapped capacity to borrow. Our reserves never are reviewed to determine if they are unneeded or excessive. Council and Staff can consistently talk about the favorable survey ratings and the like, but the real measure of a City Hall and Council is whether they can get resident trust to leverage combined community resources to the greater benefit through responsible financial support by residents and business. So the first thing they need to do is to remove the subjective pro-City Hall marketing talk from their reports and vernacular and talk to us straight.

Form Consensus and Outreach. After the Police/Fire bond measure failed—which was a disappointment because structures like the safety facility should be financed by supplemental revenue streams in the form of a bond issue—many thought the best approach would then be to gather all interest groups together and lay out a comprehensive plan where many would get their favorite projects funded by a grand bond issue.

But then the Council went ahead and funded the Manhattan Village soccer field, and other projects, like bike lanes, somehow got precedent. The Council got sidetracked whenever someone came up with additional funding, whether it was for another AYSO turfed field or the Sepulveda widening project—without determining how that might impact against our other goals. So now we are sort of fractioned off and need to be brought together.

One way toward consistency and trust would be to empower the various commissions with more oversight to community goals—each commission has a stake in the game. If properly recruited and empowered, the commissioners can keep an eye on the ball and keep it moving forward without the political pressures felt by councilmembers that take them on tangents. A Finance or Budget Commission would also greatly assist.

Focus. Council also needs to stop addressing singular projects--like downtown—just because it is put in front of their noses. Every project needs to be on the table at one time. Nor should they jump at a project just because there is additional funding dangling from another source, whether another governmental entity or private funding—going our own course on our own schedule under our own control is what will get us to the right destination.

Finally, Council needs to treat every penny spent as dear. Our City is not going to meet the priorities solely by additional revenues—there needs to be some serious consideration of what services we are spending money on day-to-day (and how often consultants really need to be engaged). Simply, Council needs to decrease the number of issues they take on and focus on the essential, realizing that the solution is through long-term budget constraints.



David Lesser...cont' d p. 8

still want to keep my eye on what is seen as perhaps a larger issue, such as pension liability; we have another labor negotiation coming up, as well as the stormwater and structural issues need addressing.”

In response to what he would want in an elected official, he replied, “What I want in my elected official is someone who, beyond saying he listens—really listens and is patient. It is part of the political process.”

Just as he stated in the much earlier interview, Lesser feels there needs to be greater involvement with the community. “We haven’t achieved the end result that I’m satisfied with yet..but there is a commitment to do better, to make the process more open and transparent, so people can really participate in decision making.”

The strength of what he felt then and which is affirmed now is reflected as he says he wants “to encourage more participation, to make people feel that they have been heard, that the process was fair, that their points were taken into account. This, I think, makes for better city government”...which, if reelected is what David Lesser promises to provide.



Feb 12

City Council 7:00 pm City Council Candidates Forum

Another Downtown Fixture Closing

After eight years with its current owner, 26 years with the previous owners and a sterling reputation for a total of probably 50 years, the welcoming open door to Lisa’s Frame Shop will be permanently closed by the end of January, of this year. The loss of yet another small downtown business will be felt by the many who relied on the personal attention helpfully provided. It was, they felt, part of the character of the small town shopping experience.

Asked to explain why the closing of what is a fixture in the downtown, owner Linda Aldworth said that their lease would be up for renewal in June of this year. She stated that while they were fortunate to have had a long term lease when the store was purchased, and that they were treated very fairly by their landlord, the reality is that prices are going to go up quite a bit. “They haven’t told us what it will be, but I know what leases are going for around here so I’m sure it is going to go up tremendously”.

She said that her husband, an art major in college, had retired after 30-plus years in Aerospace and said then that he wanted to get back into art when he retired. “So we bought the Frame Shop at 217 Manahattan Beach Blvd in October, 2006.” However, she added, while they “do not really live off the store, we just can’t afford it anymore.” Since the recession, it has been somewhat of a struggle to remain in business.

“We are not just a frame shop;” she explained, “we are an art gallery and we sell unique gifts also. But now people shop a little differently than they did before the recession; the atmosphere,” she added, “has changed a little bit”.

Asked whether she would have stayed on if rents had remained at current level, Aldworth said she was not sure she would but her husband probably would have because he loved the work involved. This, even though he had been working seven days a week for months....and this, after he had retired.

One of the reasons given for the move, in addition to rent increase, was the loss of Mike, a valued framer employee, who had been with the store even longer than the current owners, and, prior to his recent death, was an integral part of the business.”We could replace the position Mike held,” she stated, “but we could not replace the position he held with us.”

Aldworth echo’d the regret expressed by others about the store’s closing. “I feel real bad about it because people come in here every day and tell me how sad they are about it....It’s very sad—but we can’t afford to do this any longer, financially and emotionally.”

The shop’s final sale will end with the close of January. And with it another bit of downtown history.

Manhattan Beach Residents Association
P.O.Box 1149
Manhattan Beach, CA 90267-1149
(310) 379-3277 Email: yourmbra@gmail.com

() Enclosed is \$30.00 annual (2015-2016) Membership Fee.

() Yes, I (we) would like to assist.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| () City Hall Watch | () Computer Assistance |
| () Fund Raising | () Membership |
| () Communications | () Telephoning |

Name(s) _____

Address _____ (Zip) _____

City _____ Phone(H) _____ B) _____

E-mail _____ Fax _____