

Cities Report

January 2014

AZUSA

The Azusa Unified school board is studying the potential of a general obligation bond. The district currently has approximately \$78.2 million in outstanding general obligation (GO) and GO Revenue Bond debt and \$8.6 million in outstanding Certificates of Participation debt. With an assessed value of \$5.3 billion, this means the district can only carry \$133 million in total bonding debt without a state waiver. The board has been in talks with Isom Advisors regarding a potential bond measure for the June or November ballot to pay for classroom and facility improvements. Voters approved a \$10 million bond authorization in March 1987 and has no outstanding debt from that issuance, the presentation stated. Another bond was not approved until March 2002, when voters passed Measure I, a \$75 million bond authorization. The June 2002 issuance of \$30 million in bonds had a 25-year term with a repayment ratio of 1.59:1, the presentation stated, while the second issuance of a \$57 million GO Revenue Bond in December 2009 had a repayment ratio of 5.56:1. The 40-year bond consisted of 38.8 percent current interest bonds, 13.3 percent convertible capital appreciation bonds and 47.9 percent fixed CAB, which was the main reason for the relatively high repayment ratio. The 2009 bond issuance was necessitated by a 2004 Certificate of Participation, or COP debt of \$60 million that was used as a bridge loan to accelerate its renovation program. While the 2004 COP allowed the district to improve seven additional schools and access \$10.8 million in state-matching funds, the timing of the debt repayment necessitated the district's move to issue the CABs. Statistics also included a breakdown of bond dollars passed per student in five neighboring school districts. Azusa taxpayers are paying at a rate of \$37.66 per \$100,000 of assessed value, while the average tax rate in the area is \$105.08 per \$100,000. Glendora is the next highest at \$78 per \$100,000, while Baldwin Park has the highest rate at \$158.42. The General Obligation Bond would be secured by and paid by all property owners in the Azusa Unified School District.

BALDWIN PARK

The city has tentatively agreed to pay \$320,000 to settle with two police officers who sued in 2012 for alleged job discrimination. The lawsuit by Officer Mark Adams and Officer Chris Kuberry accused officials of purposely passing them over for promotions because of their history of critical comments against the city leadership. Adams and Kuberry were president and vice president of the police association at the time. Baldwin Park's newly elected council voted to end the litigation at a special meeting in December. The payout of \$320,000 is expected to go to Kuberry and Adams, according to the Office of the City Attorney. The two officers alleged in the lawsuit that they were passed over for promotions to sergeant for years despite having the first and second highest scores on eligibility tests for the position. The lawsuit came not long after the department promoted the person who scored the third highest. A litigation update to the council in June 2013 estimated the case could cost the city more than \$485,000 in the "worst case scenario."

CHINO HILLS

The City Council completed the hiring of Konradt “Rad” Bartlam as city manager by approving his employment agreement. Bartlam will begin his duties Feb. 10. More than 82 people applied for the position, with more than a quarter being current city managers. Barlam has been the city manager for the city of Lodi in San Joaquin County for the past two years. But Bartlam is not unfamiliar with the region, earning his bachelor of science degree in urban and regional planning from Cal Poly Pomona. His three-year contract includes an annual salary of \$202,800 and a one-time moving and relocation payment of \$10,000.

DIAMOND BAR

The Diamond Bar Council has given approval to Lennar Homes to move forward with a residential development. Lennar Homes, developers of a planned residential project dubbed Willow Heights, will contribute \$700,000 to Diamond Bar's park and city development fund as it prepares to move forward with construction of the homes. The mid-December vote by the City Council approved a vesting tentative tract map to subdivide the land on the southeast side of Diamond Bar Boulevard and Brea Canyon Road into 63 lots for the development of 182 homes and a minimum two-acre neighborhood park. Lennar Homes, the developers of the project formerly known as Site D, plans to build the park at 4.7 acres. Also approved were architectural and landscape plans for the land and a permit to remove 83 existing trees and replace them with 249 others. The contribution to the city's park and development fund was negotiated between Lennar and the City of Diamond Bar in lieu of covering a Los Angeles County Flood Control Channel that runs through the planned park site. Lennar will pay the contribution in 182 installments. Most of the site was owned by the Walnut Valley Unified School District. The district negotiated an agreement of nearly \$40 million with Lennar Homes. Adjacent to it is a .93 acre piece of property the city of Diamond Bar owns. The entire site is in escrow. The plans for development call for the construction of 62 townhomes, 73 detached two-story single-family condos, and 47 single family homes. The conceptual park plan includes a 3.8 acre rain garden, a walking trail, a pedestrian bridge, and entry feature, and trail head parking.

EL MONTE

In an effort to help the homeless or near-homeless, the City of El Monte has partnered with the East San Gabriel Valley Coalition for the Homeless, and a variety of other public agencies, private organizations, foundations, and ecumenical groups in the community to provide the Winter Shelter Program for the homeless. The program will operate continuously until March 2, 2014 – providing shelter from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. every night. Shelter locations in the San Gabriel Valley include West Covina, Glendora, Hacienda Heights, Valinda, and Rowland Heights. At the shelter clients will be provided food, clothing, hygiene kits, soap and towels for the showers. Transportation to the shelters is available. Two daily bus pick-ups are scheduled in El Monte from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m, with a third in Baldwin Park. Bus pick-up points scheduled.

IRWINDALE

Former City Councilwoman Rosemary Ramirez, who is facing public corruption charges in Los Angeles County Superior Court, was recently appointed to a seat on the Planning Commission in a split decision by the City Council. Ramirez, a former deputy city clerk in Baldwin Park, replaced Carmen M. Roman on the commission. Roman had re-applied for her seat, along with Art Tapia, who was also re-appointed. Mayor Mark Brededa, City Councilmen Manuel Garcia and Albert Ambriz voted in favor of the Ramirez appointment and H. Manuel Ortiz and Julian Miranda voted against it. Ramirez, along with Brededa, Garcia and retired finance director Abe De Dios are expected to be arraigned next month on charges of embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds and conflict of interest relating to lavish trips the group took to New York City between 2001 and 2005, allegedly spending \$200,000 in public funds on expensive hotels and restaurants, Broadway Shows, Major League Baseball games and limousine services, according to prosecutors. The officials have denied wrongdoing and said the purpose of the trips was to improve the city's bond rating.

LA PUENTE

The city landed on security provider SafeWise's list of the 50 safest cities in California. SafeWise used statistics from the FBI's Crime in the U.S. Report and its own research to compile the list. According to the FBI's crime statistics, La Puente saw decreases in nearly every category between 2011 and 2012. The city of 40,000 saw reported violent crime drop from 157 in 2011 to 121 in 2012. The amount of reported property crimes likewise decreased from 594 to 521. The Sheriff's Department handled three murders in La Puente both years. The biggest drops came in the categories of aggravated assault and burglary. City officials credit much of the decrease to the city's and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's push to get the community more involved, particularly through town hall meetings and youth organizations. Beyond heavier policing, officials have attempted to build trust through the meetings with residents and the department's youth activities league, which has more than 2,500 children participating. Other community events, such as a recent Christmas giveaway of food and toys to 300 community members have helped the efforts by the City.

MONTCLAIR

Construction has already begun inside the former Circuit City on a new state-of-the-art 40,000-plus-square-foot gym. Gold's Gym Montclair Plaza will be a new, full-service gym in the 5100 block of Moreno Street, just north of Macy's and next to Target. The gym is expected to open April 1, and will offer amenities such as Cardio Cinema, which allows members to get a workout while watching a full-length film. The gym will be the latest addition in Southern California for the fitness chain. The Circuit City site has been shut since 2009, when the electronics chain closed after filing for bankruptcy. Officials with Gold's Gym said that it is expected that the nearby residential units, The Paseos, which earlier this month welcomed its first occupants, will serve as a strong customer base for the gym as well as the mall. Gold's Gym follows Mina Shoes, Fly (men's fashions) and Xtreme (men's casual fashions), which opened their doors in September and October, as the newest arrival at Montclair Plaza. Prinkipia Frozen Yogurt also opened this year.

UPLAND

It is now unlawful to camp or store personal items in city streets or public places after the City Council approved an emergency ordinance on Monday January 13th. The item was in response to what city officials say has been a long-standing problem with homeless people leaving their belongings at Memorial Park. In addition to the emergency item, expected to be enforced within the next 10 days, the council also introduced an ordinance addressing the same issue to be approved at a future meeting. Currently, Upland's code enforcement did not contain a provision on camping or storing property in public spaces. City officials crafted an ordinance and urgent ordinance to allow police officers, parks and code enforcement staff to take custody of property left behind in public. This ordinance would allow city officials to store it and leave a notice that the owner of the property can come and claim it if they choose. If they fail to do so in 90 days, that property will be destroyed. If it is determined that the property is perishable and can't be secured or is contraband, then it can be stored as evidence. Upland has been receiving many complaints about homeless people using the park to store their personal items. He showed the council several photos of Memorial Park — behind the bathroom on the east side was lined with shopping carts and covered in black tarp.

WALNUT

Citing concerns over the accuracy of city statistics, the City Council voted to spend the next four months gathering more information on the effectiveness of its two red-light cameras installed at Grand Avenue and Amar Road. By a 4-0 vote, the council gave camera vendor Redflex Holdings Ltd. a three-month extension but said they would use the time to consider eliminating the cameras and/or adding more visible signage. Councilwoman Nancy Tragarz abstained. At issue was whether the photo enforcement cameras make it safer for drivers, less safe, or have no effect on public safety. Statistics presented at the City Council meeting came to varying conclusions. A city report, found the cameras have caused an increase in rear-end collisions at the intersection. Such collisions went up from 5.7 accidents per year to 8.7 accidents per year. The report says the additional rear-end accidents are offset by a reduction in broadside accidents, from an average of 1.4 per year to 1.1 per year. Jay Beeber, a research fellow with the Reason Foundation and executive director of Safer Streets LA, told the council there have been many more accidents since the red-light cameras were installed in January 2007. Collisions from cars running red lights increased from one to five and rear-end collisions increased from 24 percent to 43 percent, an 80 percent increase. Another issue with the Walnut cameras is the "no right turn on red" prohibition for cars southbound on Grand Avenue. Photo tickets cost about \$500 each and make no distinction between cars stopping and turning right or cars driving straight through the intersection on a red light. The city's five-year contract with Redflex Holdings Ltd., an Australian company, was set to expire on Feb. 27 but will now be extended until May 27. The city pays Redflex \$140,000 a year and the county Sheriff's Department about \$40,000 to maintain the red-light camera and ticketing program, for about a \$180,000 annual program cost.

WEST COVINA

The city's council has moved to settle a lawsuit with activist and recent candidate Lloyd Johnson over a denied public records request. Officials denied Johnson documents in May that showed how much the city spent on litigation related to a failed attempt to build a medical building at the civic center. A judge shut down the project in response to a lawsuit from the West Covina Improvement Association, but the city appealed the decision in an attempt to undo the precedent it set for future developments. The previous council passed an ordinance requiring a vote of the public to sell the property and paid out \$900,000 in a settlement with CGM Development, which alleged officials misled the company about the worthiness of the project. Johnson said more than \$1 million has been spent fighting legal battles related to the civic center and that the public deserves to know how their money is spent. Poor advice from the city attorney led to unnecessary lawsuits, Johnson said. Four of the council's members — three of which won seats in the November election — have said they did not believe the request should have been denied.