

## Cities Report

NOVEMBER 2013

### BALDWIN PARK

Incumbent City Councilwoman Susan Rubio and running mate Cruz Baca beat out candidate Natalie Ybarra in results posted by the Los Angeles County/Registrar Recorder. Rubio and Baca together received roughly 80 percent of the votes. Baca ran unsuccessfully for the council twice in the past. Baca said she and Rubio plan to make their decisions based on the desires of the citizens instead of rubber-stamping each other's votes. Ybarra had the backing of Mayor Manuel Lozano, outgoing Councilwoman Marlen Garcia and Councilwoman Monica Garcia. Marlen Garcia lost an attempt to gain a seat on Mount San Antonio Community College's board of trustees. Lozano ran unopposed for his mayoral seat. Rubio and Baca will likely align with City Councilman Ricardo Pacheco to form a new majority on the City Council. The new council will have tough decisions to make in the near future regarding a potential contract with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and a looming \$3.6 million deficit. Ybarra, along with Lozano and Monica Garcia, vocally support the switch to the Sheriff's Department. Ybarra said the move would keep residents from having to pay increased taxes. The taxes could appear as early as April's election if the council decides to go that route. Rubio and Baca have decried the idea of dissolving the Baldwin Park Police Department. Baca even helped lead a petition drive with the goal of bringing the topic to a future ballot. A budget released in September showed a \$3.6 million deficit for the 2013-2014 year and some suggested the switch could relieve the shortfall. A preliminary study indicated the switch to the sheriff could save \$4 million, according to Lozano. The study concluded that patrols by the sheriff's department would cost \$15 million compared to the more than \$19 million needed by Baldwin Park's police. Baldwin Park draws in lower tax revenues per capita than surrounding cities, according to its budget. The city brings in \$316 per resident, 46 percent less than the average of nearby cities.

### CLAREMONT

City Council members have approved eminent domain as a possible tool to acquire Golden State Water Co.'s assets in the city and appropriated \$350,000 to that end. The unanimous vote occurred at a special meeting in Taylor Hall, 1775 N. Indian Hill Blvd., attended by 340 people with at least 240 more watching online, city officials said. With the vote, the council directed its staff to prepare all legal documents necessary to pursue acquisition of the system. Using eminent domain, according to an agenda report, would require the adoption of certain findings by a 4/5 vote from the council at a noticed public hearing and the filing of a lawsuit. In May, the state Public Utilities Commission unanimously approved a 16 percent rate increase for Golden State Water's customers in the water utility's Region 3, which includes Claremont, Wrightwood, San Dimas and Apple Valley. Claremont officials and Golden State Water have fought for months after the water utility first requested the PUC approve a rate increase of more than 24 percent for 2013 and additional increases in 2014 and 2015. Golden State Water declined Claremont's initial offer to purchase its local assets last November for more than \$54 million. An offer from the city of more than \$55 million in October was also declined. City officials said that Claremont

pays 54 percent more for water than Pomona, 65 percent more than La Verne and a 182 percent more than Upland. The water company questions those figures.

### **DIAMOND BAR**

City Council members Steve Tye and Ling-Ling Chang have won their re-election bids while newcomer Nancy Lyons edged out an incumbent for the final seat. Tye finished on top with 2,453 votes in unofficial results late Tuesday, while Chang was in close second with 2,293 votes. Lyons, a Walnut Valley Unified board member, got 2,157 votes, finishing ahead of incumbent Ron Everett, who received 1,685 votes. Joseph Kim, vice president of sales for a dental company, garnered 1,042 votes while businessman Martin Nakaishi had 674 votes. Tye originally ran for council in 2005 and was re-elected in 2009. During his campaign, Tye said he goal is to fill every vacant store front in the city. He also vowed to continue to fight in Washington and Sacramento for improvements to the 57/60 freeway interchange. Chang, a longtime Diamond Bar resident, has already announced that she is seeking the seat for the 55th Assembly District. Chang, 36, is backed by state Sen. Bob Huff, R-Brea, and Rep. Ed Royce, R-Rowland Heights. Now that Chang has been re-elected to the council, she would still have a year before she is up for the Assembly seat. First elected to the council in 2009, Chang said that she has helped improve city services, built a new library, increased law enforcement funding, improved recreational opportunities and stretched city tax dollars. Prior to that, she served on the city's Parks and Recreation Commission and was a member of the Walnut Valley Water Board. The final seat on the city council went to Lyons. Lyons ran on a platform to improve the city's economic development, adding that she would push to fill vacant storefronts; add restaurants.

### **EL MONTE**

Voters returned all three incumbents to the council dais, and they voted to extend the city's half-cent sales tax, which was set to expire in March of 2014. Jay Gomez Gomez and his colleague Norma Macias both defeated a challenge from teacher Frank Amezcua. Gomez and Macias won 33 percent and 40 percent of the vote, respectively, to Amezcua's 27 percent. Mayor Andre Quintero, a strong backer of Eminent Domain for mortgages beat challenger Art Barrios 64 percent to 36 percent. Quintero said residents support the council's top priorities: bringing economic development to the city, building a sustainable budget and maintaining public safety. Amezcua and Barrios both criticized the incumbents for not producing enough results on their first priority. Long-promised projects such as retail around the El Monte bus station and a Norms restaurant have yet to come to fruition. Voters gave the city a helping hand in achieving the goals when they supported, by a huge margin, the extension of the half-cent sales tax Measure GG. The sales tax produces about \$4 million in revenue annually, and without it, the city would have been forced to make cuts to every department, according to a staff report on the issue. The revenue will also help prevent the closure of a fire station. Seventy-one percent of voters supported the measure, which extends the sales tax for five years. Two other ballot initiatives to change the structure of the mayor's office were defeated. Measure RM, which would have changed the mayor's post from an elected position to a seat rotated among five elected council members, failed 59 percent to 41 percent. And Measure EM, which would have changed the elected mayor's term from two years to four years, failed 58 percent to 42 percent.

## **IRWINDALE**

The arraignment of four current and former Irwindale officials accused of corruption dating back to 2001 was delayed for a third time on October 23rd as the case was transferred to a new judge. Deputy District Attorney Kennes Ma said the case was reassigned to avoid any potential conflict because the husband of the judge originally assigned to the case, Shelly Torrealba, used to work in the Public Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, which is prosecuting the group. The delay was to give the new judge, Roberto Longoria, a chance to review the motions that have been filed. City Councilmen Mark Breceda and Manuel Garcia, former City Councilwoman Rosemary Ramirez and retired Finance Director Abe De Dios appeared in Los Angeles Superior Court Wednesday on charges of embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds and conflict of interest.

## **MONTCLAIR**

Only six days after pre-leasing became available for the Paseos at Montclair North, 10 of the 27 units soon to be available have been snatched up. A 385-unit residential complex, The Paseos is not expected to have its first occupants move in until Dec. 20. But officials are pleased with the reception from possible tenants. The Paseos office has already fielded at least 60 calls from prospective tenants and had an interest list filled with 1,000 names before the leasing office opened. The Paseos staff noted that the tenants who have signed a lease did so without even seeing the units, since they are all still under construction, and made their decision based only on the floor plans. Both the first units and an on-site park are expected to be completed by Dec. 20. Completion of the rest of the 15 residential buildings will be every three weeks after that. The second building is slated to be done in early January. Interest from future tenants is coming from as far away as Long Beach and Pasadena, people who work in downtown Los Angeles and are interested being near transit options such as Metrolink to ease their commute. The Paseos is the first project in the 150-acre North Montclair Downtown Specific Plan, a mixed-use, transit-oriented, downtown district. Carlsbad-based GLJ Partners is the firm developing the project. The North Montclair Downtown Specific Plan was adopted 7 1/2 years ago, but when the recession hit, it not only stalled the residential project but developments in the surrounding area. As the northeast corner of Monte Vista and Moreno Street is being transformed into a residential community for 500 people, the surrounding properties are also seeing a rejuvenation. Down the street on Moreno, the former Circuit City building has been sitting vacant for at least five years. The site has just received approval from the Planning Commission to be converted into a Gold's Gym. In the same parking lot, the former Islands restaurant building is getting a new tenant, Famous Dave's, which serves barbecue food. Both of those are buildings on property owned by the Montclair Plaza across the street from the mall. Montclair staff said the Montclair Plaza owners are still moving forward with plans to restore the mall's east side — where the old Broadway building now sits empty — with a mixed-use development. Work on the expansion could begin as early as the start of the new year. And the city is still discussing tenant opportunities for several vacant lots and buildings in the surrounding area. The whole idea of the North Montclair Downtown Specific Plan is not only for the public to take advantage of transit, but give the area an urban-scape feel and look without the skyscrapers.

## **SAN DIMAS**

The San Dimas City Council approved a Municipal Code text amendment allowing a maximum of three chickens per lot in the single-family residential zone. Associate planner Jennifer Williams prepared the extensive, detailed report after Councilman John Ebiner and his colleagues voiced concerns a year ago about the growing trend of household chickens as pets and egg-producers for local families living in traditional homes and discussed the need to regulate such activity. Mayor Curt Morris, a reluctant supporter of the chicken issue, warned that if homeowner associations don't permit chickens on residential properties within their authority or if mortgage restrictions on properties prohibit chickens, families cannot have them regardless of city ordinance. Councilman Emmett Badar asked if there was a reason staff recommended a maximum of three chickens in R-1, or single-family residential zone, instead of four as suggested in an American Planning Association document by Jaime Bouvier. Staff had considered four, but three fit with the existing allowable three dogs and three cats per lot. The maximum of three hens is allowed only on residential lots of 5,000 square feet or larger and not in apartments or condominiums, staff noted. No roosters, ducks, peacocks, geese, turkeys, other fowls or goats are permitted due to the city's noise-and-nuisance concerns.

## **SOUTH EL MONTE**

Incumbents Joseph Gonzales and Angelica Garcia were returned to the council after easily defeating challenges from Manuel Acosta and Leo Barrera. Gonzales and Garcia each won 31 percent of the vote, while Barrera won 21 percent and Acosta won 17 percent. During the race, commercial development in the small city took center stage. While the challengers said the council hadn't done enough to bring investment to the city, the incumbents boasted their successes and said they are finding new ways to attract developers since the state dissolved redevelopment agencies. Garcia, 37, a high school counselor who has been on the council for eight years, pointed to the city's Plaza del Sol shopping center on Peck Road as an example of the council's ability to successfully attract developers, even during the economic downturn. Gonzales, 49, said the council is now challenged with the task of attracting developers without the tools it had under redevelopment law. For Gonzales, a Realtor who has been on the council for 10 years, the best way to do that is to bring light rail to the city. Metro officials are considering two alternatives for the extension of the Gold Line Eastside. One would travel through South El Monte. The other would go to Whittier. The agency is expected to release an environmental impact report (EIR) assessing the alternatives early next year.

## **RANCHO CUCAMONGA**

The City Council in the coming months will consider development code changes to accommodate long-term plans for mixed-use transit-oriented development near the Metrolink station around Victoria Gardens and along Foothill Boulevard. City leaders and planners recently toured the cities of Santa Clarita, Monrovia and Pasadena, which have established mixed-use development areas. Mixed-use development involves the interconnectivity of commercial, office, higher density residential development, and mass transit. The idea is grounded in a regional transportation philosophy that encourages walk-ability and less driving. A bus rapid-transit system by Omnitrans that is envisioned to run through Foothill and Haven boulevards is being studied.

## **UPLAND**

The 10 residents tasked with helping the city solve its financial problems have been selected. The committee, formed at the direction of the Upland City Council, will soon start to review the city's finances to find a way to free up millions in the annual budget. They are to make recommendations to the council by Jan. 31. Upland City Manager Stephen Dunn said he will prepare a report for the committee outlining the city's financial history since the last time a committee was tasked with solving a financial crisis in 2001. He will then outline what the general fund is responsible for, what it is unable to fund and past decisions made by the council. The City Council met in October to discuss the city's financial situation and hear possible revenue increases and expenditure reductions. The city is trying to free up \$3.5 million from the budget annually for the next five years. The council has been provided with a list of possible expenditure reductions and revenue increases and have been asked to rate the items by priority. The council agreed to ask a sub committee to collect more details for the council before they make any decisions. The City Council in 2001 set up several sub committees to review city finances when they were on the brink of bankruptcy. The committee came up with 13 measures as part of a financial work out plan that included decommissioning a fire engine, reducing police staffing and closing the library on Fridays. The plan also included water, solid waste and sewer rate increases and employee compensation increases over a three-year period.

## **WEST COVINA**

A federal district court judge ordered city officials to ante up \$2.5 million to continue a stay delaying the sale of three auto dealership properties back to developer Ziad Alhassen. The money would cover a \$2 million potential loss by bankruptcy trustee Howard Ehrenberg in the event that Alhassen backs out as a result of the delay, according to court documents. Ehrenberg said his second-highest bidder came in at \$2 million below the asking price. City Attorney Arnold Alvarez-Glasman stated that City Council authorized the posting of the bond. The measure passed 4-1, with only Councilman Fred Sykes voting in opposition. The decision came Nov. 5 in a closed session meeting, the same day voters decided to oust the council's majority. The newly elected council members have expressed a desire to end litigation against Alhassen, but they will not take office until December. Alhassen lost the properties when Hassen Imports Partnership went bankrupt, but he repurchased all three for \$16 million through a second company, Dighton America. Alhassen and West Covina have a bitter history and the city wants to block Alhassen from returning.