

Rolando Park Community Council General Meeting Monday, April 10 2017 RPE Auditorium

Board Members Present:

Co-Presidents: Sonia Lang and Lynn Edwards
Co-Vice Presidents: Kathryn Kern
Secretary: Judy Fleischman
Co-Treasurers: Audrey Ledesma and Debbi Blake

7:00 The meeting was called to order by Co-President Sonia Lang.

Dues and membership: Co-Treasurer Debbi Blake reported that we are up to 38 members, including a few new ones, but that we are still down from 100 last year. She asked that we tell new neighbors about RPCC, and that dues are only \$12 a year. She also stated that she'll be putting out a public service announcement to new neighbors, on our website and Facebook, reminding them to change their voter registration.

Update on the Mini-Dorm issue: Co-President Lynn Edwards reported that mini-dorm developers have filed a lawsuit with the city, so we are on hold for now; we can't move forward on getting Rolando Park included in the ordinance until the case is settled.

SPEAKERS:

California State Senator Toni Atkins: We were then treated to an informative visit by our new State Senator Toni Atkins. She cares a lot about neighborhood issues, as a result of her 8 years on the city council. She spoke highly of Chevelle Tate, our community representative when Senator Atkins is in Sacramento. She left her newsletter in the back, with more information about the state budget, legislation, and bills.

Senator Atkins spoke about three main pieces of legislation she is currently working on. First was Bill SP2, which provides funding for affordable housing, the lack of which is a huge crisis in our state at this time. That includes affordable housing on all three levels. (Aside: Who knew wealthy people had a hard time finding houses in areas good enough for them?)

The second area Senator Atkins is working hard on is that of human trafficking. She's working on legislature to educate the hotel/motel industry on how to recognize when trafficking is occurring because that is often the place it does occur. Another bill has to do with closing a loophole in the law to make it easier to convict people guilty of this horrible crime.

Thirdly, our Senator is introducing language in the legislature that will help us move toward single payer health care in California. She reported that when we passed the ACA, we brought California down from 17% to 7% uninsured, but that now she wants us to take it to the next level. Single payer health care is complicated; she mentioned Kaiser and Medicare as good examples.

Senator Atkins also told us she's working with others to lower costs of a college education, and that, while there will be more monies this year, we need long-term solutions for sustainable education funding. She then brought up the gas tax, which will be increased over the next two years. The State of California hasn't increased the gas tax since 1994; we've seen the price go up and down due to fluctuation in oil prices and the federal government. She knows the new tax is controversial, but feels it has to be done to deal with such things as local road repair and public transportation. Before taking questions, Senator Atkins asked us to not hesitate to call her office with our concerns.

During Q and A we learned: No money from the gas tax is allocated for the bullet train; the state has almost paid back money it borrowed from education years ago; car registration will go up from \$25-\$100 per car after January; the cigarette tax will go towards smoking prevention, and to increase medical reimbursement under MediCal to ensure access to all people with MediCal; legislators are trying to keep college tuition from going up; proposals are being considered to make education less expensive.

Darnisha Hunter from Mayor Falconer's Office then opened the floor to questions. There was a great deal of interest in homelessness. Darnisha Hunter, a very passionate speaker, described how a standard clean-up went a few weeks ago, one that she had asked for volunteers for at our meeting. Thirty people showed up at 5am, and covered all of District 4. There are lots of canyons owned by people who complain about homeless people living there. At the first encounter, volunteers and the Quality of Life Team from law enforcement ask them if they want help. If they do, only 4 out of 80 in this case, the Homeless Outreach Team comes and immediately takes them to shelters. If not, they are told they have to move. The third encounter involves enforcement and jail. Six families at that particular time were found living in cars.

Darnisha informed us that Mayor Falconer has already allocated more beds, for short, long, and interim terms. Veterans, for instance, may have a voucher for a place to live, but are unable to find one. In addition, the city is looking into finding city-owned property and converting it into a shelter with all the services under one roof, since part of the problem is getting the homeless to the various services they need. Each category of homeless people has a different need. There are chronic homeless, some playing the system, and some who have lost everything. She stressed that we are never going to end homelessness, and as was seen from audience comments, there is a great deal of anger and frustration over it.

Ms. Hunter also explained that it is a complicated issue. Stacy Spector, hired by Mayor Faulconer, has come up with an “ecosystem,” in which all needs and players are online, and can be matched for housing and a variety of needs. There was recently a city council meeting and forum at Golden Hall, from 1pm – 6pm, and was open to the public, attended by a variety of groups interested in plans to help with this huge problem.

Another problem was brought up by a resident of the condo complex across from the 7/11, about the bus stop there. Darnisha said the representative from Myrtle Cole’s office would speak to that. She did share an anecdote about how she brought in law enforcement and narcotics to make it uncomfortable for the unwanted people hanging around businesses in the Skyline area.

Katie Sadd from Myrtle Cole’s Office spoke briefly about the meeting at Golden Hall, and that one thing that came out of it was to form a select committee to work on homelessness, clarifying the city’s role, discussing funding options, etc. We applauded the new stop signs at Vista Grande and Marlowe when she asked if we’d seen them. She then informed us that the “goat trail” has now been fully funded, all the way from Livingston to College Grove Drive, as part of a bigger project. The construction schedule is still TBD. She spoke next to the joint use field at RPE, and told us that by our next general meeting on May 8 she’ll have a date when there’ll be public input about the field.

Lastly, Katie addressed the problem at College and Billman, in the parking lot, with noise, etc. She’ll be talking with Lynn to set up a date when we can have a discussion with nearby residents, business owners, reps from RPCC, and Terry Hoskins to come up with ideas. Katie will also be there.

GUEST SPEAKER Joseph Mazares from Urban Corps: Before talking about the free sidewalk tree program, Mr. Mazares gave us an interesting overview of Urban Corps, which has been in existence in San Diego since 1989, and is part of the state conservation program. Urban Corps serves young adults, both men and women, from 18-26 years old. It has a strong education program and boasts from 50-90 high school graduates each year. About a third of the youth say high school just wasn’t for them, another third had problems with the law or had major difficulties in life, and a third are refugees. There is lots of diversity in the program as a result; for all of them, Urban Corp represents a second chance at life.

The Urban Corps motto is Learning, Earning, and Conserving. The organization creates opportunities to learn trade skills, including landscaping, construction, and recycling. They do a lot of graffiti abatement, hold e-waste events, community improvement services, and landscape projects. Urban Corps has been contracted to pick up the trash at both Qualcomm and Petco Park events, where they separate out the recycling, bringing the percentage of recycling from 27% to 68%. They are exempt from prevailing wages, which helps them get contracts. They have even cleaned up homeless encampments. It is an amazing program, to be sure.

Mr. Mazares then spoke about the free tree program, which has the goal of increasing our urban forestry and decreasing the greenhouse effect. Urban Corps has been planting trees for the City of San Diego for 10 years. At one time they went door-to-door, but now you can fill out a form on their website. Then someone will come to your home and do a site assessment to check for a viable space and review the property for utility lines. You do need to be a property owner, and have to water the tree or trees for 3 years. Ideally, they prefer to plant in the parkway, but if you don't have one, they will plant within 10 feet of the street. Also, they will plant as many as will fit, as long as there is about 10 feet between trees.

The preferred trees are drought tolerant, with 20-30 ft. canopies. He left a list of 9 preferred trees, all with lovely flowers, but there are actually 200 trees available. Mr. Mazares stated that they like to plant by mid-June, as the city shuts down in the summer, then again in the fall, which is supposed to be the best time to plant in San Diego. The free trees are in 15-gallon containers and would normally run from \$40-\$50.

An audience member mentioned that 8 trees were recently planted at 69th and Veronica by Urban Corps if anyone would like to take a look.

This is a wonderful program to beautify our neighborhood and make it a healthier place to live. Let's get planting!!