

## **Councilmember Roles and Public Involvement**

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As the Moorpark City Council prepares to welcome a new member to join in analyses and deliberations about the issues that face our community, I thought it would be helpful to reflect again on what I believe to be the roles of a city councilmember and of a non-elected member of the public—both essential to public involvement, in this great participatory democracy we enjoy.

I believe it is a city councilmember's duty to lead, and to: (1) Review and analyze all projects and proposals that come before the city council in detail; ask questions about them, their potential benefits and impacts, how these might offset each other, and how impacts are proposed to be minimized or eliminated; and, suggest how projects might be made better; (2) Be the "staff to the public," regarding all issues, but especially any issues about which the public will be required to make the final vote of *Yea* or *Nay*, as occurred during the recent North Park campaign; and (3) Communicate to the public as clearly as possible about one's views and especially about any advice councilmembers may have to assist the public in making informed decisions and votes.

To that end, I will continue to make myself available to the public to discuss issues and concerns. Since 1996, well before I was elected to the city council, I have regularly written and published essays in local newspapers about various topics. Some of these have been about participatory democracy, open space preservation, school to career, transportation, election summaries, land use planning, and fighting poverty. I will continue to do this to help provide some understanding on key issues. Over twenty essays are posted for public review under "ISSUES/Commentary" on my website ([www.roseann-mikos.org](http://www.roseann-mikos.org)).

Since April, 2000 I have maintained this website to present information to the public from time to time and to offer online discussion groups to the public—to hopefully spark constructive dialogue about local issues. See “INTERACTIVE/Discussion Groups” on the website. I will continue to update the site periodically and invite everyone to participate in the discussion groups. While sincere people can disagree about issues, open dialogue helps us understand differing points of view.

When residents care about local issues, or when any issues require citizens’ votes, I believe that it is each resident’s responsibility to become informed regarding those issues. They should ask for information from either the city council or the city staff if they need to know more about a particular issue. They should feel free to share their support or concern publicly, as many do.

Given my beliefs about frank communication with the public, I was puzzled when it was reported in the *Acorn* that Mayor Hunter and I were being chastised for being “outspoken” during the ‘No on North Park’ campaign, suggesting that we were disconnected from the voters. The entire city council was criticized for using what was characterized as an “exhaustive” process that “they should not have gone through” re: the North Park housing project. Clearly, there is a misunderstanding about the public review process.

California planning law, and other laws, require cities to have an open “full disclosure” process regarding the benefits and impacts of any proposed project—especially one that would require a significant change to our General Plan (the city’s blueprint for planned development), as would the adoption of North Park. SOAR requires that projects that would replace farmland/open space with urbanization, outside the urban limit line, must have a public hearing process and a debate of the people. This happened and North Park was overwhelmingly defeated by voters.

When a developer proposes a project on land he owns or controls, even when it would require changing the rules (amending the General Plan), once the application is deemed “complete,” our city is obligated by law to provide a full hearing on the project’s merits and demerits. Regardless of perceived community sentiment, we cannot shortcut the process and deprive either the public or the developer of a fair hearing. And large, complex projects, like North Park, take more time than simpler projects.

If Mayor Hunter and I had not shared our concerns about North Park, once the final project was established, and if Councilmember Harper had not shared his enthusiasm for the benefits, we would not (in my opinion) have been serving the public well. I believe that when people elect councilmembers, they expect them to study the issues and keep an open mind until a decision is made. Then, I believe residents expect their councilmembers to go on record, very vocally, with what they believe needs to be done, and why (or why not), based on the information studied.

In my opinion, it would have been a disservice to the community if the only information available during the North Park election campaign had been the literature funded by the developer, with nothing from the loyal opposition. Both pros and cons needed to be part of the election debate and I applaud Councilmember Harper and Mayor Hunter for joining me in leading a vibrant debate. Even though we did not all agree on that issue, the public had a greater opportunity to vote on an informed basis. That’s how the process, and democracy, work.

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