

# Reality check is in the mail

Tucked in among the assorted junk that constitutes my weekday dose of printed communication received via the U.S. mail are some reminders of real life in our town.

Beside the usual torrent of credit card offers and entreaties from charities I never heard of, here's some of the recent "reality checks" that have landed in my mailbox.

Glossy hit pieces from both LAUSD school board candidates informed me that Neal Kleiner is a liar and Dick Vladovic is the mayor's puppet. The only reality reflected in either of these mailers is the low opinion campaign operatives have of voters' intelligence.

Maybe this kind of stuff is the reason less than 7 percent of the electorate bothered to cast a ballot in this race. It's too bad we don't have TWO for junk mail.

**Another day brings the latest Ponte Vista newsletter containing pretty pictures and the glowing promise of a better life when we surrender to the notion that San Pedro should be just like the rest of Southern California.**

**Despite the developer's multifamily, multibillion dollar dream, reality is the 7,000-plus people who have signed petitions in support of keeping RI (single-family) zoning at the site.**

**At the recent annual meeting of the Palisades Residents Association, councilwoman Janice Hahn talked about seeing her neighbors' RI yard signs when she walks out her front door. "I get the message," she said.**

**Hahn also told the group she has been given no reason why the Ponte Vista zoning should be changed. She then pointed out that the proposed senior housing component was nothing more than a means to provide condos for people 55 and over who didn't want to live around children.**

At least once a month, I get a package from the Port of Los Angeles. It includes agenda notices and Port Community Advisory Committee minutes. I also get regular servings of bureaucratic alphabet soup in flavors such as NOP (notice of preparation), EIR (environmental impact report), and other variations of CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) and NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act).

It all adds up to more discussion about the waterfront and what to do about it. After years of talk and millions of dollars spent on consultants, designers, experts and refreshments (perhaps the best reason for attending any of the public meetings), it's time to do something.

For the past six or seven years, San Pedrans have been unanimous in their desire to have a continuous walkway along the waterfront. Part of this promenade already exists. Most of it does

not. The port's recently announced negotiations to remove the West-way tank farm near Warehouse One is a good sign that one day we may get a promenade that extends from "bridge to breakwater." That would be a great reality.

Dealing with the port is like playing three-dimensional chess. Beyond the city's bureaucratic maze, there's state and sometimes federal puzzles to be solved.

The flap over Eastview Little League, the Peninsula Dog Parks group, 22nd Street, and Knoll Hill illustrates the problem. Building ball fields at 22nd Street seemed like a simple idea, but had ramifications all over the place.

These included re-opening the environmental review process, consulting the State Lands Commission, reworking the plan to satisfy area merchants' need for more parking, getting Harbor Commission approval, and accomplishing all of this by the end of the year.

Of course, whenever anyone in government says it'll be done by the end of the year, you should always ask, "What year?"

Mail from the city is not all fun and games, though. Let's not forget bills from the Department of Water and Power. The neighborhood councils learned a lot fighting rate increases. Standing up for L.A.'s consumers has become a primary responsibility of the councils, which assumed a watchdog role thanks to an agreement with DWP providing unprecedented access and consultation.

Some of us get an annual business tax bill from the city, too. Los Angeles is, by far, the most business-unfriendly city in Southern California. The city levies taxes on all the money you bring in, not the money you keep. The city has made some strides in reforming its business tax system, but still has a long way to go.

Finally, there's the annual property tax bill, which is the biggest reality check of all. Property taxes are government's cut of the price we pay for the American dream. It's why, too, homeowners have the greatest influence with political decision-makers.

Whether it's advisory boards, neighborhood councils, or the city council, those who have invested the most will speak loudest and longest when it comes to community issues. In a democracy, it's important that all have the opportunity to be heard and their opinions considered. These forums exist, but are meaningless if people don't use them.

We get these reality checks in the mail every day. Maybe we should send some of our own.

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