



CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES

July 27, 2010

Ms. Linda Hunt
26302 Barkstone Drive
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275

Dear Ms. Hunt,

Thank you for sharing your concerns with me. Please let me explain my thinking for you to consider.

For the first three decades of its existence RPV spent little or no money on public facilities except in cases of emergency. The result was detrimental to our property values. We have much lower property values than Palos Verdes Estates which has voted numerous times to impose extra taxes (lately a \$700 annual parcel tax) to support public facilities. PVE has its own police department, much nicer public buildings, much nicer streets, and is finished with its storm drain repairs for now. PVE voted the parcel tax in by over 80%. We in contrast had difficulty with a storm drain fee of less than \$100 per year even though we have had dozens of homes badly damaged or destroyed by failed storm drains and even though the fee funds only a fraction of the repairs we know we need.

Now it appears some will share your concern about sewer fees that for most residents will be under \$20.00 per year. It is worth remembering that before the storm drain fee, we suffered millions of dollars in property damage with little or no maintenance being done to prevent harm. And most of that property damage was not covered by residents' insurance. While the sewers are not in the state of disrepair compared to the storm drains, they too are in need of preventative maintenance, and only a dedicated revenue stream that cannot be used for other purposes will guarantee continued good performance of our sewers. Failed sewers would cause damage that would make the problems we had with failed storm drains seem minor.

The improvements proposed for our parks are likely to be at least partially funded by grants that cannot be used for sewer repair. But regardless of the source of funding, Community Parks are important too. We do all of our residents a disservice when we refuse to develop community parks that are accessible and useful to our residents. Lower Hesse Park and Grandview are both badly neglected. If we are really so bad off financially (and we are not) that we cannot afford to make them at least somewhat usable as parks, then we should sell the land as surplus and deploy the money elsewhere. I do not favor such an approach because our study has shown that RPV is

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below average in recreational opportunities. True we have excellent open space preserves. Those preserves are over two square miles (or 15% of the city's land area) and are way above average. But our parks are not part of those preserves. They are meant to be parks. And the City's parks are good neighbors. They close at sunset (and the closures are enforced) and we get few complaints.

It is true that improved parks are not "necessary." Neither are improved street medians or a new city hall to replace our leaking 50-year old army barracks or buildings to replace the trailer park that serves as the rest of our civic center (the senior center and emergency preparedness center are in trailers). I think many people in RPV favor only having what is absolutely "necessary" for public facilities. I favor a different approach because I think it is better for our property values and quality of life if we strive for something more than what is "necessary." I think we should strive for what is "desireable," provided we can afford it.

Many people seem to feel that in these tough economic times the city should slash spending, employment and salaries. Why we should do this or how it will help the economy escapes me. The City's revenues are continuing to increase (in large part because Terranea opened). Improving our parks, streets and public buildings is the most responsible thing to do with those increased revenues in these tough economic times. Our spending is on one-time items that do not significantly increase the City's operating budget. If revenues decline, we can simply delay or cancel capital improvements. Further, we are spending the money at exactly the time that we are likely to get the best prices.

Interestingly, our fellow South Bay City of Lawndale is building a new civic center at a cost of \$9 million. Lawndale recently completed some work on streets and medians that make its streets look much nicer than ours. And its parks are not fields of weeds. Lawndale is the only South Bay city that has as little revenue per person as RPV has. Even with our new Terranea revenues we have only \$1.20 per person per day. But I do think it is reasonable for us to aspire to be like Lawndale and to provide public facilities as nice as the ones it provides.

Much of what the City does is "unnecessary" if we are willing to accept the bare minimum. There are many unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County, and they do get by. Cities can disincorporate. If we did so, your taxes would go down. So perhaps you should urge such a course. Personally I think it would be unwise.

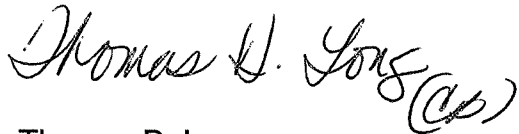
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So my priorities are that RPV should strive for improved quality of life of its residents and improved property values. Of course this requires overcoming our culture of mediocrity in which we accept or even encourage the idea that our local government should only provide us with the bare necessities and nothing more. None of us live so frugally in our personal lives, and it makes no sense to impose unnecessary frugality on our City when it only damages us. After all, the City is simply us. It is our tax money which we are spending to enhance our lives and our properties.

I won't go into the details of Grandview Park because your letter addressed mostly financial priorities which I discussed above. I will say that Grandview Park is the closest City park to my home. It is not a good park, though, because it does not have parking, restrooms, proper trails that someone with a bad ankle and knee can use, and benches. It is supposed to be a "community" park, but it really is not usable by most of us. In its current state it is really just a backyard for its neighbors. Indeed, one speaker told us that the council had "promised" to leave it the way it is for the benefit of a wealthy PVE resident, Mr. Chopra, whose property borders the park. Nonsense—we made no such promise. Public land does not belong to those who border it. We can and should do better with public land than simply leaving it as a facility that only immediate neighbors can use.

I hope this helps you better appreciate my thinking and why I am taking a different course than what you prefer. I invite further dialogue with you and your neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas D. Long" followed by a circled "CP" in the bottom right corner.

Thomas D. Long
Mayor Pro Tem, Rancho Palos Verdes

CC: Mayor Steve Wolowicz
Councilman Doug Stern
Councilman Brian Campbell
Councilmember Anthony Missetich
City Manager, Carolyn Lehr

July 20, 2010

Dear Councilman Long:

I live in the neighborhood next to Grandview Park and am writing because I would like for the park to be left as is. I am mostly concerned for my neighbors who border the park. I am certain, that if your home bordered the park, you would also want to preserve the beauty and serene environment of the parkland.

Secondly, I was amazed to see in last week's Peninsula News that the city will be raising our property tax in order to have money to complete the sewer project, yet, council members seem so eager to spend millions of dollars to develop parkland that surrounding neighborhoods want left alone. In these tough economic times, how can you even consider raising taxes, and then turn around and spend millions on an unnecessary project? I feel city council needs to get their priorities straight, find the money to pay for sewers without raising property taxes, and stop planning on spending money on unnecessary projects.

Sincerely,

Linda Hunt

Linda Hunt
26302 Barkstone Drive
RPV