



**Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment
Valley VOTE Meeting Report
May 18, 2016
Minutes recorded by David DeVoss**

***DWP in Action -
Union hacks, Sweet Heart deals, Featherbedding,
Oh, my!***

When East Valley native and Pepperdine MBA **Felipe Fuentes** was elected to the **LA City Council (District 7)** in July 2013 he soon realized that no other part of Los Angeles' vast bureaucracy was as opaque, over paid and politically compromised as the city's Department of Water & Power. But unlike his council colleagues lulled into complacent by an annual transfer payment that will rise to \$320 million within five years, Fuentes decided to do something about the utility. "I want to begin a conversation to restructure the governance of the utility," Fuentes told the much larger than normal crowd at Valley VOTE's May meeting. "DWP has a fiduciary obligation to its rate base but it's not performing as it should." Despite having a budget of over \$7 billion, DWP insists it needs more money to replace water mains and hasten the transition to power generation that consumes less fossil fuel. Fuentes wants the DWP to have a professional staff that will help the governing board use its revenues more efficiently. "The DWP should operate like a utility and serve the needs of its customers," Fuentes insists. "Currently the DWP asks for rate increases every three to four years but often is unable to explain how it used the money it received previously."

It uses a large portion of its money for increased salaries and pensions, the highest and most generous in city government. Unfortunately, job and economic security have not improved efficiency. The utility's attempt to introduce new computerized billing

procedures was an economic and public relations fiasco. DWP's civil service employees have little accountability and often take five to nine months to make a decision. Often union employees ask for money they have no ability to spend. "The board needs a professional staff that can make an independent analysis," Fuentes adds. "We have to eliminate civil service so DWP can be in charge of its own people. Salaries are completely out of whack because they are negotiated by the Mayor and Council, neither of which knows how to manage a utility. Elected officials have a role to play but they shouldn't manage minutiae."

Fuentes presently is gaining support for a local ballot initiative that will make DWP more accountable. Says Fuentes "No matter what we do water and power will get more expensive. A professional staff that does some benchmarking against other utilities should be able to manage the increases more professionally."

Porter Ranch – Fighting for Fresh Air

Porter Ranch is a bucolic bedroom community in the Northwest San Fernando Valley with beautiful homes, manicured lawns and excellent schools. What you do not see there, however, are joggers. They mostly have disappeared since a massive October 23, 2015 natural gas leak from 115 Aliso Canyon oil wells enfeebled the community. "Three days passed before the gas company admitted there was a toxic benzene and toluene leak," remembers **Kristina Zitkovich** of the **Save Porter Ranch** organization. "My daughter got dizzy, my Mother developed headaches. Nobody knew we were being poisoned."

Southern California Gas capped one of its wells so Save Porter Ranch asked that the remaining 114 be tested. Residents wanted a six-point check on each well; the Assembly reduced that to two points. Now SoCal Gas is objecting to the reduced standards, arguing that summer brownouts will occur if it is not allowed to reopen the Aliso Canyon storage facility.

Zitkovich argues that SoCalGas should close the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility and pipe gas in from Mexico and down from Santa Clarita, which has a gas facility about a quarter of the size

of Aliso Canyon. The problem is that there is no gas pipeline from Santa Clarita to LA, where most of the natural gas is needed.

For 20 years, LA had a contract to buy gas from the Aliso Canyon field. The contract expired three years ago but the gas continued to flow since it was convenient for everybody. The October leak exposed the lack of maintenance. *Save Porter Ranch* has a champion in US Congressman Brad Sherman, who is about the only politician demanding remedial action.

“SoCalGas is attempting to pass through to Los Angeles area consumers the cost of the gas leak, which resulted from their own negligence,” says Sherman. “They have decided they don’t want to pay for the cleaning protocol that the L.A. County Public Health Department says is necessary to make homes safe.

“When it comes to the L.A. County Department of Public Health, SoCalGas has a process of both *relying* and *defying*. They *rely* on LA County Department of Public Health when they say that Porter Ranch residents can safely return to their homes and should no longer receive relocation assistance. But they *defy* L.A. County Department of Public Health directive to pay for the cleaning protocol necessary to make Porter Ranch homes safe.”

“You might think responsible adults would fix the problem they created but it’s hard to get local politicians, much less SoCalGas to take a meeting,” fumes Zitkovich. She won’t have that problem with Brad Sherman since he’s a resident of Porter Ranch.

Vic Viereck - Parks & Rec Parcel Tax

The County Board of Supervisors is having an ordinance drafted to put a new Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation tax on the November 2016 ballot. Although our parks certainly need financial support, it appears the new parcel tax will cause a hefty increase in the existing parcel tax.

The Supervisors are considering a 35-year parcel tax of 3 to 5 cents on each of the 6.4 billion square feet of developed real estate in the county. In addition to a significant increase from the recently expired

parcel tax, the newly proposed tax will include CPI- based increases in the rate. Considering that the new tax rate would be on what is called developed real estate in the County, it appears that the tax would only be assessed on ground real estate covered by buildings and other structures.

Property owners can get a strong comparison of the old tax (which is on our property tax statements) and the new tax rate by multiplying the 3 or 5 cents a square foot by the covered land at their properties. It's already a big increase.

It also appears that some of the new tax revenues could be spent on some other purposes meaning the new parcel tax could be a lot more than the tax being replaced.

Ralph Kroy - Sunshine Canyon Landfill

The landfill continues to receive more complaints and violations from citizens and the Southern California Air Quality Management District, SCAQMD. Since January 2009 thru March 2016, the SCAQMD has received 9,068 complaints and has issued 180 Notices of Violations (NOVs).

The new acting head of the SCAQMD (Wayne Nastri) and his Directors for Engineering & Compliance and for Planning & Rules held a Town Hall Meeting on the evening on April 16, 2016, at the Van Gogh Street Elementary School in Granada Hills to discuss the large number of odor complaints caused by Sunshine Canyon Landfill and attempt to explain the high levels of toxic volatile organic compounds (VOCS) that are present in the escaping methane. Over one hundred neighbors attended. The SCAQMD acknowledged that there was a real odor problem, and that the agencies in charge have not been solving the problem. The Sunshine Canyon Landfill - Local Enforcement Agency, (SCL-LEA) who was present at the meeting and is in charge of seeing that the landfill meets all the State's requirements for operating the landfill continues to say that the landfill is meeting the requirements of its Solid Waste facilities Permit (SWFP) while claiming that the SCAQMD is responsible for enforcing the air quality and not them. Interestingly, on the very same day of the meeting, there were 51 calls into the SCAQMD from residents and from the school, and some of the SCAQMD staff that had arrived

early were treated to the stench that the community has had to put up with on a nearly daily basis for over 7 years, while the current landfill manager, Rob Sherman, continues to claim that if there are any odors coming from the landfill “they are faint and fleeting”.

The audience was given an opportunity to speak, and they were not shy. Many suggestions were presented, including that the landfill reduce, or stop putting in more trash until they get the gas collection system under control and /or stop the odors. Historically, the landfill which reopened on the City side in 2006 did not build an adequate collection system to collect and treat the methane gas being produced even though BFI/Republic's design plans required a much more robust system. So here we are with the landfill playing the catchup game at the expense of the neighbors and the school, and raking in huge profits.

Another Town Hall meeting with the SCAQMD is scheduled at the school for June 9, 2016 at 6:30 p.m.

Ernie Hilger - Veterans Housing Update

On April 24, 2016 there was a *Veterans Service Organizations*, (VSOs) and Elected Official Joint Meeting at the West LA VA . Good Meeting - Intros/management style/Informative/balanced/informative/- Distributed a draft organization chart for the Executive Leadership Team. The Executive Leadership Team Members present gave brief bios and took questions. There were seven executive team Members present in the draft organization document presented. Their purpose is to manage the greater Los Angeles VA and its catchment area approximately 240 square miles.

Ann Brown, the newly appointed Director of the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System serving 90,000 veterans patients and their dependents distributed a draft organization chart for the new Executive Leadership Team. ---- There were seven Executive Leadership Team members present at the meeting. The new leadership and organization structure was discussed. Ann Brown mentioned in passing the target date for passage of H.R. 3484 is May 30, 2016. After passage, construction of permanent facilities will begin.

The first construction will be for women veterans with children. *It will be one of five villages set up to permanently house veterans. The*

specific location on the West LA VA campus is yet to be finalized

The Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) present gave constructive inputs on a wide range of topics. The chartered Veterans Service Organization's positive, and constructive inputs were received well by the Executive Leadership Team. The importance of two way communication was focused on with examples given of miscues. The Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEB) was discussed.

The closing for Personnel Search for Executive Director Community Engagement & Reintegration Services (Homeless Programs, Domiciliary Programs, Outreach Programs) was on 4/24/2016 (this is the second solicitation).

About 40-50 persons were present at the meeting representing Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and elected State and Congressional representatives.

The Director made the announcement that a 501C3 entitled "**1887 501C3**" has been formed by the private sector for the purposes of redoing the Chapel and three other Historic Buildings on the West LA VA campus. The technical presentation on Parkinson's Disease was excellent and is a good example of "BEST PRACTICES" which could be easily implemented across the VA health care system.

Sound Off!

Valley Vote's has added a public comment period to its monthly meeting. Coming toward the end of the meeting, Sound Off! will give members and guests an opportunity to briefly voice their opinions and concerns in brief two-minute presentations. Members attending our meeting will have the opportunity to discuss their concerns.

The press and public are invited to attend the next meeting of Valley VOTE on Monday, June 20, 2016 at Galpin Ford.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE (www.valleyvote.org) is a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations committed to exploring and fostering the implementation of programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters. We meet monthly to address key policy

issues and hear reports from our standing committee chairs. For additional information about Valley VOTE, for an upcoming meeting agenda, or for previous meeting reports and press releases, we encourage you to go to the Valley VOTE website or contact Joe Vitti at javittisr@cs.com.