

WHAT DOES A COUNCIL MEMBER DO?

As posted on Next Door in two installments

Every year when the annual Town Council elections are announced, someone is sure to ask, "What, exactly, does a Council Member do?"

To start with, there is no "exactly" about the job. The Council does not make the laws or enforce the laws. This is done by the County and/or Public Safety Agencies. To paraphrase the By-Laws, the ATC will convey the needs and wishes of the residents to the county and provide a forum to discuss and hear concerns of the Altadena Community. How this is done depends, for the most part, on the Community's wishes and concerns.

As you may know, the ATC is comprised of 16 individuals (2 in each census tract) who volunteer their time to serve our community. But what else do you know about the Council or your Council Member?

If you have not already done so, I encourage everyone who is considering a run for a Council seat, to come to a Council meeting (3rd Tuesday of the month) or Land Use Committee meeting (1st Tuesday of the month). The meetings are held at 7pm at the Community Center. If you had been to the Council meetings in 2016, you would have seen and/or heard:

Special presentations from : Pasadena City College, Foothill Water District, Southern Calif Gas, Athens Disposal, Reading Partners, PUSD facilities update, Collaborate PASAdena, Pasadena Humane Society.

Monthly reports from: California Highway Patrol, Altadena Sheriff Station, Altadena Library, Collaborate PASAdena, California 41st Assembly Advisory Committee, Altadena Chamber of Commerce, and periodic reports from Altadena Fire, CERT, LA County Parks.

Recommendations to Regional Planning: 2 Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) for sale of alcohol Amy's Cafe, ALDI's - both yes, 3 CUPs for residential construction - 2 yes, 1 no, All of these required community outreach by Council Members to residents and provided the opportunity for public comment at Council meetings.

"That's what the Council does. So what does a Council Member of the Altadena Town Council do?" you ask. This should give you an idea.

Here's what a Council Member MUST do:

Attend monthly meetings - Land Use Committee every 1st Tuesday, Council meeting every 3rd Tuesday

If a vote is scheduled, come to the meeting prepared with an understanding of the issue.

If a resident has applied for a CUP (Conditional Use Permit) which is an exception to a County guideline, they may be required to get a Letter of Recommendation from the ATC. The CM works with the county planner, the resident and the neighbors in order to recommend approval or denial to the County. The County may, or may not, accept the Council's recommendation but at least the neighborhood has been heard.

Respond to a resident's request for assistance in dealing with county services. Sometimes this means providing contact information for the appropriate department. Sometimes it means contacting the county department yourself. With experience you will learn which response is appropriate.

Communicate with residents in your census tract on a regular basis. Use Facebook, Next Door, private email lists. It doesn't matter how you do this as long as it becomes a 2 way street between CMs and residents.

Understand that an important part of your job description is to LISTEN. Because your job is to present the wishes of your community, first you must listen to all sides of an issue without inserting yourself into the problem.

Here's what a Council Member SHOULD do:

Not take everything personally. Often criticism is not really being directed at you but is reflecting frustration of the resident. Be sure you understand the real problem before responding. This is not an easy thing to do.

Educate yourself about basic services of particular interest to your residents and keep them informed of changes.

Educate yourself about things the ATC has done in the past. Minutes of ATC and LUC meetings are available on the ATC website.

Maintain a sense of humor and recognize that everything is not about YOU.

Support fellow Council Members - offer help when needed but don't tell them what to do unless asked.

Here's what a Council Member GETS TO do:

Learn what is really happening in Altadena.

Meet a lot of very interesting people.

Feel like you are making a difference in your community.

Attend various openings and ribbon cuttings. Some may consider this a MUST DO but when you attend these events, you get to share the excitement and happiness of others on their important day. This can be more than rewarding.

One of the major challenges facing a Council Member is “time.” A CM donates his/her time to serve the community. Many have full time jobs. Many have other community or personal commitments. But, no matter what, a Council Member needs to make himself/herself available to residents. This means spending more than the approximately 3 - 4 hours a month attending Council meetings.

None of this is meant to discourage a potential candidate. Sure, being a CM can be challenging and often frustrating. But when all is said and done, you can rest well knowing that you have done your best to help your neighbors, your community and perhaps, even yourself.