

## Chapter 9

### ORGANIZING GOVERNMENT

The council met under primitive conditions on December 21 and 28, 1987. Our fourth and fifth meetings were in our temporary office at 26111 Bouquet Canyon Road, Suite A-4. It was an “as is” unheated room, where Fred Bien’s area was set off by a room divider, and Carmen Sarro and part timer Jill Klajic worked. The council had hired Carmen, and Fred hired Jill at \$10 an hour because she knew everybody.

Fortunately those two meetings were during the day. We did not like the idea of having meetings outside the evening hours, but there was a lot of work to be done, and during the school vacation all councilmembers were able to meet any time. The only controversial item was the question of paying back the county, which came up on the 28th.

The council table was a door lent to us by Sharon Hormell; it had been turned into a table with the addition of legs from a local hardware store. We sat on somewhat rusty metal folding chairs, more of which were set up for the audience of perhaps a dozen people.

The last meeting of 1987 was held at Hart High School, as were some of the meetings early in 1988. However, we were rovers, holding the council meetings at times in classroom 307 at Arroyo Seco Junior High School in Saugus, which had a folding partition so that we could enlarge the space if community turnout was good. Sometimes, if the meeting was of great interest, we met in the multipurpose room.

As 1987 closed we voted to ask the Board of Supervisors to join a joint planning group for the Santa Clarita Valley with our planning department, which did not yet exist. Jo Anne Darcy and Dennis Koontz joined me in establishing this request as policy. Buck McKeon and Jan Heidt voted against it, saying the Supervisors would never accept. McKeon and Heidt were right. My motion to get an independent opinion from another legal firm on the question of paying the \$2.7 million to the county died for lack of a second. Some law firms had called the agreement “financial blackmail.” We were unanimous in voting to request of LAFCO a sphere of influence over Elsmere Canyon, and authorizing a good salary to hire a Director of Community Development.

We opened 1988 with some goals. We wanted to open a temporary city hall, which turned out to be a store front on Soledad Canyon Road, annex territory in Canyon Country, form some commissions and create a master plan. We did not anticipate building any roads, but wanted to look for the money that would allow us to build them. The county was showing signs of working with us on growth outside of our boundaries. We did work on traffic signals and the oak tree ordinance.<sup>1</sup>

Part of opening a new city hall was hiring our staff. We needed people to assume some of the duties we were contracting from the county, so we could save

more money and develop genuine local control. The savings came in part from undercutting the county's 30% charge for undistributed overhead.

When the issue of a building moratorium came up on Jan. 14 there was extensive discussion. I was opposed to it, but the discussion was going nowhere. To move the meeting along, I moved adoption. Public testimony on the issue had taken about an hour, with about thirty of the 400 or 500 people in the audience coming to the microphone. Muriel Usselman, president of the Santa Clarita Civic Association, which had been reborn, testified, "One need only look around at the havoc created by the Board of Supervisors' stamp of approval." On the other side were the developers and construction workers, who feared delaying ninety-two projects.

I had said that I wanted "developers to know that they can get a fair deal from the city of Santa Clarita, maybe tougher than the county, but maybe we'll give them better service."<sup>2</sup>

I did not enjoy supporting the growth interests, but I believed that being willing to work with them would bear fruit for the city. We would certainly need their support for most annexations. We knew that LAFCO would not approve any attempt to annex an unwilling landowner. The moratorium went down in flames, with only Jan Heidt voting in favor. The rest of us had pledged during the campaign to oppose the imposition of one.<sup>3</sup>

At the same meeting we decided to appoint a five-member Planning Commission, with each council member to appoint one commissioner. I pushed for pay, and the council adopted a meeting fee of \$50, with up to two meetings a month to be paid. \$50 was not good pay for the hours of study, of reading the agendas, and the long meetings, but it was something. Some people wanted us to appoint volunteers. My feeling was that asking people to volunteer was elitist. No one should have to be well off to be able to serve in city government. When years later I shared a cab with the Mayor of Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, I was horrified to find that she was paid \$75 per meeting of the council, and some expenses. Of course she was retired and financially independent.

When asked by Sharon Hormell who I expected to appoint, I named Louis Brathwaite. Jan Heidt said she had several people in mind. She refused to comment on speculation that she would appoint Allan Cameron, saying, "Let's keep them scared." One of the reasons I named Louis Brathwaite at a time when three council members were keeping quiet was to give Connie Worden a chance at a nomination by another member.<sup>4</sup>

We were not getting complete and understandable information from the county planner, Dick Anderson, who was acting as our planning director. There will probably always be a shortage of government planners who can understand the growth industry well, as the best are heavily recruited by the private sector.

Dorothy Riley, a teacher from Placerita Canyon who had carried petitions for cityhood, blasted the four of us who had voted against a moratorium in a letter to *The Signal* that was published on January 22. It said in part, "They blew their op-

opportunity to make a well-informed decision about whether to review...cases for answers to questions like: ‘Were Quimby Park development funds or land required and adequate? Are parking requirements minimal or adequate? Is there more than one entrance to the tract? Was the Oak permit ordinance effectively applied? Is the plan amendment legal? Was the DMS [Development Monitoring System] applied with integrity?’ All letters were taken seriously. Sometimes we read them to the audience at council meetings. The council asked the Planning Commission, which had been appointed January 28, to look into whether the builders were contributing their fair share to city infrastructure, including the schools.<sup>5</sup>

We were fortunate in being able to name five outstanding people to the Planning Commission. Mayor Buck McKeon appointed Rita Garasi, who had led a campaign to tax new home building for school construction, had been a member of the countywide Citizens’ Planning Council and the Santa Clarita Valley Planning Advisory Committee.

Mayor pro-tem Jan Heidt named Pat Modugno, to the surprise of many. He had served two terms on the San Fernando City Council, including a term as Mayor, had been a member of the Metropolitan Water District board, was a vice president of the Conrad Hilton Foundation, and had been a senior vice president of American Savings and Loan. At the time I did not know he was married to Joyce Tucker, who had been the most outstanding student teacher with whom I had ever worked.

Jo Anne Darcy appointed Jeanette Sharar, who had her own real estate firm, was active in the SCV Chamber, chaired the hospital foundation and was a member of Zonta.

I appointed Louis Brathwaite, who billed himself as a “federal property administrator” with his own computer furniture design company. I found out much later, when he received a letter giving him permission to say more about what he had been doing, that this was a cover. He had been employed by the Secretary of the Air Force to work on “special projects.” Even in his autobiographical work, titled *White Mans Job – Black Mans Job* to emulate street talk, he said little more than that.

Dennis Koontz appointed Connie Worden, who was described by *The Signal* as a perennial charity and civic committee volunteer. She had been vice chairman of the City Formation Committee. The council confirmed all the appointees in a single motion.

The Commission was given less than six months to write a billboard ordinance, ten months to regulate the cutting of oak trees, and about the same period of time to deal with the question of a Tenneco cogeneration plant in Placerita Canyon. For the time being they did not even have a permanent director.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes we solved problems by borrowing ordinances from other cities. We copied a tough oak tree ordinance from the City of Thousand Oaks until we could customize one of our own.

Fund raising reports were completed and filed on time late in January. Jo Anne Darcy had topped the list with \$21,080, including \$1,519 in non-monetary contributions, while Buck McKeon had raised about \$10,000, including \$5,000 he had lent his campaign. Jan Heidt had raised \$5,911, Dennis Koontz \$3,262, and I had managed to raise about \$1,500 by the end of the campaign, according to the *Daily News*, or \$1,200 according to *The Signal*. The total raised by the City Formation Committee was \$69,508, with \$4,482 coming from council candidates near the end of the campaign.<sup>7</sup>

Late in January, 1988, we were treated to a presentation on sewage collection and treatment. There were a bunch of sanitation districts in the county. Board members appointed by the city council dominated those that were located largely in cities. Mayor McKeon and Councilmember Darcy, with Supervisor Deane Dana representing the county, composed the boards of Sanitation Districts 26 and 32. The thought hit me, "Now that we comprise a majority of the directors of the sanitation district, should we not require annexation to the city for those parcels that want to join the sanitation district? The developers kept themselves out of the city. If we tell them they can't go to the bathroom in any of their houses, they're going to start to want to annex very very quickly."

Jim Gratteau, Financial Administrator of the Districts, dismissed the idea. "You can't place unreasonable restrictions on properties that want to annex," he said. I let it go for the time being, but could not help but wonder why Los Angeles County did not adopt the Ventura County model, which required development to go into cities.<sup>8</sup>

The Shapell-Monteverde tract on Plum Canyon Road was highlighted briefly as a good example of development in county territory totally dependent upon the city for access. Yet we had no sphere of influence. William Ross refused to give testimony but did say there would be a park, six acres maybe, or twelve and one-half acres maybe, although discussions with the county were tentative. Prior to the meeting I had been given some photographs of traffic jams in Santa Clarita. I held them up. They made the point. News photographer Gary Thornhill provided photos on a number of occasions, and I loved using them.<sup>9</sup>

Fred Bien began to nudge the council towards strategic planning late in February. While it was relatively new to cities, and few were involved in the process, it was something that Jan Heidt and I supported with enthusiasm. The problem was that Jan wanted to plan for the year 2000, and I wanted to think about the year 2100. Buck McKeon said to us, looking first at me, "You take the year 2100, and Jan, you take the year 2000, but I'll take next week." We agreed to meet on a Saturday morning to discuss the city's goals.<sup>10</sup>

Fred led the exercise. On the first round those of us present listed our top priorities. "Accounting of county charges," was my item. Mayor McKeon wanted a city hall. Having inadequate staff and little space in which to work was frustrating. Jo Anne Darcy was most concerned about traffic, and Jan Heidt listed school overcrowding. We had no jurisdiction over the schools, but hoped to have an impact on the conditions that led to overcrowding. Dennis Koontz was late.

We brainstormed until fifty-two ideas were listed, and ranked annexation as the most pressing issue. Traffic came next, since the Bouquet Canyon Road intersections were a mess, and Soledad Canyon was the only road between Canyon Country and Valencia. I proposed setting aside a right-of-way for a subway system that might be needed in a hundred years, and won support. Bigger parking spaces were an issue. Planning, development of our own municipal code, economic development, disaster preparedness, a city hall, acquisition of the Saugus Rehabilitation Center site from Los Angeles, a larger court facility and county formation were other issues discussed.<sup>11</sup>

Disaster preparedness had been the first item mentioned when the five council members-elect met in Buck McKeon's office following the November 6 election. We had been very worried about the prospect of not being ready for any eventuality, and while it was not that high on the strategic planning list it was something we worked on consistently. In 1994 we were very glad we had.

I pushed the creation of an arts commission and building facilities. Nicholas England, acting president of the California Institute of the Arts, a major project of the Disney family and a jewel in our city, was quick to support the idea.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Performing Arts Center which opened in 2004 was a cooperative project between College of the Canyons and the city.

I obtained council approval to testify in Sacramento in favor of LAFCO reform. Ruth Benell had reported that the proposed city of Calabasas could not support itself, and Senator Ed Davis had sponsored a reform bill as a result. Both Mayor McKeon and Connie Worden expressed concern that my testimony might damage our relationship with LAFCO. Allan Cameron commented on behalf of SCOPE that there was little "chance of preserving a relationship that does not exist." I was willing to take the risk that diplomatic testimony would put a little pressure on Ruth Benell to clean up her act. We certainly would not gain anything by playing dead.<sup>13</sup>

My concern about accounting for county charges, expressed at the session on strategic planning, arose out of the county's first bill for services. For a month and a half of services it amounted to \$100,000 per week. The charges for animal control had exceeded the estimate the county had made for the entire balance of the fiscal year, and there was no detail in the bills. Supervisor Schabarum said the county could pull services if we did not pay. Communications with the Chief Administrative Office were poor because Richard Dixon was tied up, dealing with a strike by county nurses.<sup>14</sup>

City Attorney Carl Newton elicited criticism from the council when he offered a draft municipal code for us to adopt without being able to tell us how it was different from the county code. We did not get to see it in advance of the council meeting, but *The Signal* did. Fred Bien had given them a copy, saying that on first glance it looked little different from the county code. However, it was described as a sophisticated code derived from the experience of Burke, Williams and Sorenson with the various cities they represented, including Manhattan Beach, Downey, Bell, Whittier and Baldwin Park.

The proposed code included business taxes, increased fees and legalizing fireworks. Jo Anne Darcy asked how we could change city attorneys. His fees came up for criticism also.<sup>15</sup>

I raised the issue of a city trash franchise. We had four garbage companies collecting trash. Each one of them sent a large truck down each street each week, and there were garbage barrels on the sidewalks four days out of seven. They charged various rates and offered various levels of reliability. I thought we could cut the noise, save wear and tear on the streets, cut the rates to the lowest one for the best standard of service, and take a cut of the action for road repairs, thus saving the taxpayers some money. All we had to do was split the city into exclusive areas with each company being given its existing share. The trash companies were receptive. They could save money on soliciting customers, and the time and expense of driving their trucks all over the city. Charlie Caspary of Atlas Refuse Removal was right when he said, "That could be a pretty hot political hot potato. But the City Council wanted the job and I'm sure they're well equipped to handle things."<sup>16</sup>

In mid-March Connie Worden and I flew to Sacramento to testify before the Senate Committee on Local Government about LAFCO. Fortunately Pacific Southwest Airlines provided cheap air service and we could fly up and back for not much more than \$50 per person. The trips to Sacramento became a routine, particularly as we had no staff to spare to make them. Whoever was taking a turn would fly up, often before dawn, take a van or taxi into town, and testify before a committee. We got to know other council and staff members from Los Angeles County very quickly, and so could often pool a cab to save money. We would testify, go back to the airport, and catch the next flight to Burbank. It was not fun.

Typically, on arrival at the capitol building we would stop in the office of Senator Davis to pay a courtesy call and get a briefing, sometimes from Ed Davis himself, and often from Hunt Braly, his chief of staff. Ed was always courtly, and would call me "Your Excellency." That made me smile. We would be given background material on committee members and talking points on bills. Generally I found the members of the Senate and the Assembly, whether Republicans or Democrats, to be caring people trying to do a good job.

The committee members knew many of the people in the audience at the hearings. They were paid lobbyists. Other council members would point them out to us. "He's the most powerful lobbyist in town. All he has to do is say a few words." That meant he had been around a long time, had many, many clients, and therefore had a very large income, a significant portion of which he invested in campaign contributions. The contributions gave him access and clout. On the other hand, we had access and clout, too. We soon found that the representatives at the state level cared about meeting us and listening to what we had to say. By going to see them ahead of a hearing we could often get a member or two to speak for us, emphasizing the points we made quickly during the time for testimony.

We did not waste their time. I did not like hearing the phrase, "I know you are busy so I will not take much time." I just cut to the argument and got out of

the office. If only members of the public could forget they are entitled to speak for three minutes, or whatever a particular limit is, and prepare their points for a thirty second presentation they would find they could be much more effective. In three minutes the average person can lose the interest of any legislator.

I knew that a legislator who was interested would pick up on my points and ask questions. If he was not interested, though he usually was, he would at least not shy away from seeing me another time. Democrat Senator Ruben Ayala received us on our first visit. He had a copy of Davis' LAFCO bill, SB 2277, on his desk, all marked up, and said he would like to be a co-author. That gave us bipartisan support, which most members of the legislature seek.<sup>17</sup>

On April 7, 1988, the testimony on SB 2277 went well, with Senator Davis picking up support as co-authors from another local senator, Newt Russell (R-Glendale), Senator Quentin L. Kopp (I-San Francisco) and Senator Ayala. Davis told of the experiences in Los Angeles County, saying, "The process for seeking freedom has become a difficult process." He went on to say that when a LAFCO does allow a city to be born, "sometimes you have a twisted dwarf come out."

While there were amendments, the bill proposed that an independent consultant project the budget for a proposed city, allow cityhood proponents to appeal LAFCO decisions to Superior Court, and require LAFCO to draw up a sphere of influence upon incorporation. Opposition had come from the Building Industry Association and Ruth Benell. In June the bill passed the Senate, 24-12. Ultimately the Davis bill went down, but another bill, which had been requested by the two chambers of commerce in Santa Clarita, was successful. I was not attending Local Government to speak in favor of SB 2814, which would stagger the terms of the councils elected in newly incorporated cities, including those organized recently. However, when one senator raised an objection, I put my name in to give testimony. He said that the top candidates in Santa Clarita had only received 12% and 10% of the vote, respectively. I pointed out that the reporting was flawed, that each voter had five votes to cast, and that in a twenty-five way race Buck McKeon had enjoyed the support of roughly 60% of those voting, and Jan Heidt had 50%. That bill passed into law easily.<sup>18</sup>

Early in April we sat down to dream some more as we began the process of hiring a permanent city manager. Fred Bien had brought in a facilitator to help. We often hired consultants to do a job. They were not cheap, but when they had done their job they were gone. That kept the payroll down. We wanted to hire people only when we knew we would need their services regularly. We dreamt of a city which ten years hence included a large area, including Castaic, with plenty of recreation facilities, and no billboards. We dreamt of a trail system, a city hall (so we could stop paying rent), and a high voter turnout. We dreamt of a Santa Clarita State University, a performing arts center with an art gallery and symphony hall, fairgrounds. Dennis Koontz needled Mayor McKeon, "When you call for information on the phone, you're going to get accurate answers, but with no western music on hold." He also needled *The Signal*, saying undiplomatically that we needed another local newspaper. Dennis forgot who owned the ink. Jo

Anne mentioned a major mall with a Nordstrom and a Broadway.<sup>19</sup> The latter was way overdue.

As the months went by I asked about the lack of paychecks for the council members. It turned out that Carl Newton had forgotten to put the item on the agenda, and that pay was not automatic, as I had thought it was. I insisted that it go on the agenda as a retroactive measure, and Carl Newton said that if no one sued us that would work. When the issue came up at the last meeting in April I spoke to it, saying that one should not have to be independently wealthy to serve in office. I slowed my speech, and said, "I really hope that if there is anyone in the audience who has any qualms whatever about the council voting itself pay, that they would step forward." I did not want anyone to have the issue go by them because we acted too quickly.

Buck McKeon said, "Last chance if you want to speak against this action. I worked it out. It's about \$2.50 an hour."

We passed the pay action unanimously, and were warmly applauded by the 200 in attendance. "It's the first time I ever heard a government board get a hand for giving itself some money," I observed.

"Don't make a habit of it!" exclaimed a booming voice in the back.<sup>20</sup>

We leased space in the building at 23920 West Valencia Boulevard for the city hall. Our storefront at 21021 Soledad Canyon Road, #101, rented from Newhall Land, was extremely small. The city attorney, auditor, and five council members shared one desk. In fair weather, conferences could be held in the back alley. Saunders Development Corporation had a good facility for lease, and we took it even though it was well west of the center of the city. Newhall Land had offered to build to suit, but that would have taken too long. Later, when the building was put up for sale, we bought it, and continued to lease out space to the other occupants in the building. For a time we made a profit on the building that way, cutting our housing costs to nothing. As leases expired and the city's needs grew, we took over more space. Each time we took more space it was to the benefit of the taxpayers. As we offered more services, and contracted fewer from the county, we were able to cut our overhead charges more than the cost of the extra space involved.

In May we hired Kyle Kollar away from the City of Lancaster as our Community Development Director. He moved into a temporary office with borrowed phones on the third floor of the bank building across the street from our new building, awaiting the conversion of our space. Kyle had to scramble to organize his department while assuming the responsibility for planning which we had dumped in his lap.

We appointed Todd Longshore, Mike Lyons, Donald Rimal, Laurene Weste and Linda Storli to the Parks and Recreation Commission; both Lyons and Storli had been viable council candidates. I had gone over the forty-eight applications for the commission, picked my top four, and invited them to a session at Tiny Naylor's restaurant. We sat around a table, and talked about their respective experiences. It was proving to be a very hard choice, so I asked them to rate each



other. Two candidates surfaced, and I picked the one, Laurene Weste, who had gotten the highest ratings from the remaining ones.

Todd Longshore, 31, was an experienced coach and a real estate appraiser. Mike Lyons, 41, was a customer service manager who had attended faithfully the sessions of the Planning Advisory Committee. Donald Rimac, 50, was the coordinator in charge of four regional occupational training programs and a volunteer for the SCV Special Children's Center. Laurene Weste, 39, was a community activist who had worked on water conservation, parks and horse trails, as well as the dream of a Santa Clarita Woodlands State Park as a 6,000-acre buffer between the Santa Clarita and San Fernando Valleys. The latter was one of my dreams, too, which I had begun working on in 1969. Linda Storli was a government teacher at Canyon High School, who wanted proactive efforts to provide recreation for teens and seniors. Dennis Koontz and Linda Storli had met on the campaign trail. They eventually divorced their spouses and married.<sup>21</sup>

Another problem we had was that the incorporation had developed into a national story, but people did not know how to reach us. There was no Santa Clarita post office, and no telephone exchange. I called information and asked for the City of Santa Clarita. They could not give me a listing. We worked on that problem for years. In 1991, as Mayor, I wrote to the National Geographic Society to point out that their new atlas missed a city of over 100,000 souls.

When I changed my address to Santa Clarita, using the old zip code for Newhall as I had been told I could do by the post office, some of my bills went to Saugus, and then to Castaic. Sadly, when the U.S. Postal Service moved the Newhall post office from downtown Newhall to Lyons Avenue, they changed my box number from 333 to 220333, put in a forwarding order so that all my mail went to P.O. Box 333 in Castaic, ten miles to the north, outside of our city limits. When I raised the issue before the council I had intended to publicize the name so that both "Santa Clarita" and the local community names could be used. However, Scott Newhall took it that Jan Heidt and I wanted to change everything. "As far as the rest of the world is concerned, the name Santa Clarita has all the excitement and dignity of such important cultural capitals as Placentia, Citronella, Hootnanny Corners or Shake and Bake, Arkansas." We could not win them all.<sup>22</sup>

Dan Hon beat us all to the address change. On the day of incorporation he began handing out business cards with his new address.

One of Fred Bien's primary responsibilities was to help the council hire a permanent city manager. We received fifty-four applications for the job, which was to pay about \$95,000 a year. We interviewed five of the applicants. I felt that two of them were particularly suited to us. Norm King, the city manager of Palm Springs and a Swarthmore College graduate, was one. George Carvalho was the other.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Daily News*, Jan. 3, 1988.

<sup>2</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 15, 1988.

- <sup>3</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 15, 1988.
- <sup>4</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 17, 1988.
- <sup>5</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 22, 1988.
- <sup>6</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 31, 1988.
- <sup>7</sup>*Daily News*, Feb. 2, 1988, and *The Signal*, Feb. 10, 1988.
- <sup>8</sup>*The Signal*, Feb. 5, 1988.
- <sup>9</sup>*The Signal*, Feb. 14, 1988.
- <sup>10</sup>*The Signal*, Feb. 24, 1988.
- <sup>11</sup>*The Signal*, Feb. 28, 1988.
- <sup>12</sup>*Daily News*, Feb. 29, 1988.
- <sup>13</sup>*Daily News*, Feb. 27, 1988.
- <sup>14</sup>*The Signal*, March 2, 1988.
- <sup>15</sup>*The Signal*, March 2, 1988.
- <sup>16</sup>*Daily News*, March 17, 1988.
- <sup>17</sup>*The Signal*, March 25, 1988.
- <sup>18</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, April 7 and June 10, 1988; *Daily News*, April 7, 1988, and *The Signal*, April 8, 1988.
- <sup>19</sup>*The Signal*, April 6, 1988.
- <sup>20</sup>*The Signal*, May 1, 1988.
- <sup>21</sup>*The Signal*, May 15, 1988.
- <sup>22</sup>*The Signal*, June 12, 1988.