

October 19, 2010

It's been over a year since I've been coming to council meetings to speak out against the new street-sweeping parking rules. The only meetings I've missed this year are those nights I've been out of town, including the last meeting. While I'm sorry I wasn't able to talk about the issues on those nights, I have to say I didn't miss being before this council. I never planned on being a community activist and I hate doing this...it takes a huge amount of time, I get really nervous and I always have to brace myself for the response afterwards: will I be ignored, lied to, or insulted? These seem to be the only options lately. I was shocked at the treatment given to the speakers at the last meeting. In his response to a resident concerned about a serious lack of fire services near her home, the city manager first "outed" her as the wife of a firefighter (as if that somehow makes her opinion less valuable) and then proceeded to categorically brush off her concerns and even referred to her personal story as rhetoric. What was even more shocking came after the City Manager's comments, when Don Schweitzer lashed out at another resident, calling into question his public documents requests. He was apparently concerned about the amount of staff time devoted to such requests, as if that wasn't an important part of the staff's job. Although this topic was totally unrelated to the agenda, the city attorney let it go on, and we all learned that the city is keeping a special file to document Mr. Vodhanel's activities. I'm sure everyone's relieved to know that Big brother is keeping an eye on us unruly residents, and I'm sure all of these threats and insults will have their desired effect, as fewer residents dare to speak out and ask for information. Perhaps residents wouldn't need to make so many public documents requests if the Brea government were more transparent in the first place? And perhaps the requests wouldn't be so hard to fill if Brea's massive IT department figured out how to store documents electronically? And if Mr. Schweitzer is so concerned about the use of staff time, then why did he approve a street-sweeping parking exemption program with an application process that is

an EXACT duplicate of the overnight parking permit process? doesn't seem very efficient to me. But I digress...

The disrespect shown at these council meetings toward residents is unacceptable, and points to how badly a change in the council is needed. As the BreaVoices group interviewed the candidates for City Council, we asked them what they would do if a resident was ignored or even insulted during matters from the audience. Jim Grosse said that such residents should be "appreciated and applauded" for their efforts. How is that for a breath of fresh air?! Ric Clough noted that when one resident speaks at matters, there are probably ten or maybe a hundred others with that same opinion, so they should be listened to and respected. Brett Murdock insisted on professionalism at all times. Steve Vargas said that residents should be treated with dignity and respect and frowned upon abuse of the Brown Act. Don Havard suggested that a response is always required – even saying "I disagree" is better than ignoring the residents. Many of these candidates stressed that is the job of the council and staff to address the issues raised by the residents, and if an answer can't be provided that night, then it is the responsibility of the council and staff to follow up with that resident and get it resolved. Sounds like a pretty big policy change from our current council, doesn't it? It would be a welcome change, with a government that is truly of the people, by the people and for the people. Brea deserves to have council members who listen to them and work in their best interests. If you feel, like I do, that the current council majority isn't doing that, then please get to know the candidates and learn about their positions on the issues that are important to you. Don't trust a blogger, a cartoon, a mailer or even me - go to BreaVoices.com or search YouTube for BreaVoices (all one word) to see the videos of the candidates so you can judge for yourself. You have THREE votes on November 2nd so now is the time to get informed. You don't have to get up here to make a difference. Your VOTE is your voice.