

East Sac ADVOCATE

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Working For A Livable Community

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A Publication of the East Sacramento Preservation Task Force, Inc.

Mission

East Sacramento Preservation Task Force, Inc. is a grass roots neighborhood group determined to protect the quality of life and the unique appeal of neighborhoods.

We unite to preserve residential character, to maintain and expand urban tree canopy, to defend the health of our environment and the safety of our streets.

Vision

We want to elect lawmakers who act in accordance with these goals. We want genuine transparency in the municipal process so citizens are informed and heard. Where the process is broken we want it fixed; where it works we want to ensure that it works for everyone.

Values

Service
Truthfulness
Activism
Teamwork
Accountability

Working For A Livable Community

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Inside

Alhambra Corridor Update
Editorial Cartoon

No Sunshine at City Hall

Spotlighting "a discouraging and troubling trend for the cause of transparency and open government," Bee associate editor Foon Rhee recently critiqued "ad hoc" City Council committees. These committees meet privately "with no public debate or dissent." The potential for abuse here is obvious. Deals can be cut, financing arranged, developers brought on board, —all in the dark. Important city issues from the arena plan to the fate of the K Street mall are presently assigned to such committees, thereby, Rhee says, "robbing the public of true input."

Mayor Kevin Johnson states that efficiency is the reason for the ad hoc panels and further asserts that if they "circumvented the public process he wouldn't go along with them." However, given Johnson's penchant for instituting a City Hall shadow government filled with "executive interns" (some from his campaign, some from development firms), his protestations are suspect. Stealth ad hoc panels convening in secret do not inspire public confidence. Rhee observes that "while participatory democracy can be unruly and uncomfortable, doing the public's business behind closed doors only sows suspicion."

While it is legal to permit city officials and "interested parties to talk candidly outside the glare of public scrutiny," such conversations short-circuit the common good. "Just because it's technically legal doesn't make it the right thing to do," he says. His observations are well made and deserve serious attention.

SUNSHINE LAW DEFENDS NEIGHBORS' RIGHTS TO KNOW

Wonder about the campaign donations local politicians received from developers and their associates? The Public Records Act is one instrument that can help allay your curiosity. Part of legislation approved under the Freedom of Information Act, the PRA makes records of deals, meetings, and contributions available to citizens who request it. This access derives from efforts made by Sunshine advocates who insist that government transparency is a vital arm in a functioning democracy. On the national level Attorney General Holder has directed all executive branch departments and agencies to administer FOIA requests with a "presumption of openness." Holder asserts that such disclosure is at the heart of the Freedom of Information Act and says, "We are restor(ing) the public's ability to access information in a timely manner."

Locally, Sunshine advocates include newspapers, broadcasters, neighborhood advocacy groups, environmentalists and civil rights organizations. During the controversial Mercy expansion neighbors were able to discover the donations received from Catholic Healthcare West's corporate functionaries, including those who did not live in East Sacramento. In the recent council election the same kinds of data were available. Large donors who don't live in Sacramento are listed. Such information is obviously valuable to citizens who want to assess the performance of their elected representatives.

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RIGHTS TO KNOW *(continued)*

East Sacramentans who want a full and truthful account of City Council dealings can contact Californians Aware: The Center for Public Forum Rights. This nonprofit was originated to assist people who are blocked in their access to public information and to foster open governmental meetings and records. Citizens can also contact the California First Amendment Coalition, California Common Cause and the California Newspaper Publishers Association. All of these groups advocate transparency and accountability.

Is the information you may want on line? Only some of it. Sunshine activists surveyed information about financial disclosures, bridge inspections, consumer complaints, even school performances, and concluded that only Texas "provided all 20 categories of information considered." California offered only 11.

Presently local officials blame "furloughs and budget cuts for delays and denials in public requests for information." (Basofin, Data Surfer, Mar. 2010). But the information is there. Citizens have a right to it and a need for it. It belongs to the public. In order to make officials accountable, citizens have to be informed.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Advocate

I know the Sacramento Sixty are a group of business-owners and developers who supported the Strong Mayor proposal, but I am curious about their motives. Who are they exactly? Are they like the Phoenix Forty, the kitchen cabinet that helped transform that desert city into a polluted, concrete nightmare? Given Kevin Johnson's penchant for stealth volunteers ("executive interns"), how will the Sixty influence city government? How many of the sixty are environmentalists? Neighborhood preservationists? Advocates for government transparency? How many of them work to sustain the parks and trees that make Sacramento unique? How many contribute to our museums, libraries? Finally, how many of the Sacramento Sixty live within Sacramento City limits?

M. Kennedy

Now Playing—Nightmare on H Street



Steve: Stand Up and Vote

Our City Council recently voted to boycott Arizona. Sacramento joined Los Angeles, San Francisco and the U.S. Conference of Mayors in condemning the race-predicated and almost certainly unconstitutional legislation signed by Governor Jan Brewer. Even though polls show that majorities presently support Arizona's actions, our council stood with its soon-to-be victims, stood with the Constitution. There were two exceptions: Steve Cohn and Robbie Waters.

Waters said he didn't think the Arizona issue was city business and voted no. Cohn didn't vote. He left when the debate began, returned when the vote was over. This created the expected impression. Cal Watchdog, a web based journalism site, called it "pathetic cowardice." Others, including the mayor, expressed similar, if less pointed disapprobation. When confronted Cohn said he indeed opposed the Arizona boycott and gave as his reason: "The closest consensus among voters was that this was not something City Council should spend their (sic) time on."

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