

Published February 27th, 2013

How to Train Your Council Members

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Phil Arth and Roger Wykle with their homework. Photo Sophie Braccini

They campaigned and they won. But Moraga's newest council members had to clear one more hurdle before getting down to business. Phil Arth and Roger Wykle recently talked about learning the nuts and bolts of running a town.

"We went to a seminar Jan. 16-18 organized by the League of California Cities in Sacramento for new council members and mayors," said Arth. "The curriculum was rigorous, but it was explained to us in very interesting and sometimes funny ways."

The first big topic was the Brown Act, which was designed to ensure public access to, and complete disclosure of, the discussions and decisions made by city councils, county boards, and other local government bodies. "We worked on case studies, like the city of Bell," said Wykle. "One of the restrictions that applies to us as council members is that we cannot discuss the town's affairs with more than one of our colleagues on the council (outside of scheduled council meetings)," said Arth. "Additionally, we cannot discuss the matter with one of them at one point, and with another one later; that would be considered a 'serial meeting' and would be a Brown Act violation."

The town's attorney, Michelle Kenyon, later reinforced some of the lessons in separate meetings with the new council members. "She put a big emphasis on the Brown Act and gave each of us a document regarding rules to apply to emails to avoid violations," said Arth. "She told us about the FPPC's (California Fair Political Practices Commission) hotline where anyone can report alleged violations."

Planning and finance were also addressed in the seminar. Arth found the planning section interesting. "Roger (Wykle) was on the planning commission, so he already knew most of it," added Arth.

"In my last job in the Coast Guard, one of my responsibilities was sourcing and finance, and the municipal system is quite similar," said Wykle of the finance section. Arth, who was a CPA and has experience working with non-profits, was similarly at ease with the material.

"Another thing that I learned during the training is that people who speak during public meetings do not have to give their names," said Arth. "It's reasonable to ask in order to have a proper record, but if people don't want to give their names, that's fine."

The seminar was not all hard work. "We had time to spend with our colleagues from Lafayette and Orinda, and I got to know Roger (Wykle) better," said Arth.

When they returned, in addition to their meetings with Kenyon, the new council members received training at the local level from Town Manager Jill Keimach.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA