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## Moraga officials attend 'Mayors and Council Members Academy'

By Vera Kochan

The League of California Cities held its annual "Mayors and Council Members Academy" in Monterey, Calif. this year. Mayor Teresa Onoda, Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke, and Town Manager Scott Mitnick attended the Jan. 24 - 26 conference, which was intended to give attendees access to various sessions designed to help them run their municipalities more efficiently.

According to the League of California Cities' website, "The academy covers the legal, financial, and practical fundamentals to your job as an elected city official. Sessions also include an update on key legislative issues and an overview of your Cal Cities Services."

"While the annual 'Mayors and Council Members Academy' was initially set up to serve as an orientation and training session for newly elected mayors and council members," explained Mitnick, "the Academy has been broadened over the years to also serve as a 'refresher training' for those who have been in their roles for a number of years. It is not unusual for city managers to also attend, especially with newly elected officials." A "Harassment Prevention Training for Supervisors and Officials" session focused on current and emerging issues, while teaching officials and supervisors how to identify, prevent, and properly respond to workplace harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and abusive conduct in order to avoid liability.

Another session, "Developing an Effective City Council and City Manager Team: The Key to Good Governance and City Success," discussed the importance of a good working relationship guided by open communication.

"Your Legal Powers and Obligations; Open Government and Conflicts of Interest" session helped attendees learn the breadth and limitations of their powers as city officials by acquiring a basic understanding of the legal authorities and restrictions under which cities and their officials operate. The course focused on open government laws, such as the Brown Act and Public Records Act, and laws pertaining to conflicts of interest. The "Policy Role in Land Use Planning" course was designed to teach the tools and processes in land use planning, such as the general plan, zoning, and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as well as the role of regional agencies and the state.

"Effective Advocacy and Key City Issues" shared ideas for establishing practical skills to develop persuasive arguments and testimony that would serve a city's interests.

"Social Media/Digital Communications and Civic Engagement" explained that as misinformation increases, elected officials need to be quick on their feet and have the necessary skills to proactively manage public perceptions about local government concerns.

"Financial Responsibilities, City Revenues Workshop" dialog centered around local government financial cycles, elected official financial oversight duties, state and local funding relationships, and the four stages of fiscal meltdown.

The last session centered around "Understanding Public Service Ethics Laws and Principles." State law requires elected and appointed officials to receive two hours of training in specified ethics laws and principles every two years.

During the Feb. 14 Town Council meeting Onoda said, "Imagine if you had to run an obstacle course and you could look at it from up above, from a helicopter, you could see all of the sequences that would arise. You would manage the course in a much more quick and effective way, and that's pretty much what this gives you."

"I found it very valuable," added Woehleke. "I attended an earlier version of this in 2019, and this was a whole lot more useful, partially because it was perhaps my second exposure to some of it, but some of the topics addressed were far more mature." He also enjoyed the opportunity to network with other city officials from various parts of California.

"Of all the national, state, and regional conferences," stated Mitnick, "this Academy is the one that many find to be an effective primer as to how California local government works, with a timely summary of current challenges effecting cities and towns. This year's Academy was extremely well done with sessions directly applicable to the Town of Moraga."

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