

Research and Steering Committee Report

Pasadena City Council

The Research Committee Meeting met via Zoom to interview the candidates for City Council Districts 3, 5 and 7. In District 5, **Jess Rivas** is running unopposed so, as is our custom, we did not interview her but are happy to have her on the Council and hope to invite her to address our Steering Committee sometime after the elections. The meeting was attended by Karen Breau, George Brumder, Beth Gertmenian, Susan Kane, Jeanette Mann, Juliet Martinez, Marilee Marshall, Barbara Paul, Denise Robb, George Van Alstine, Ed Washatka, Tim Wendler, and Bruce Wright (13). Jon Fuhrman joined us for the District 7 interviews (14).

The candidates were asked questions designed to elicit their views on the investigation of potentially illegal police shootings, how we can protect our tenant population from excessive rent increases, how we can help the homeless population, how the City is going to meet its new housing requirements and accommodate increased density in residential areas, how are we going to deal with the future of the Rose Bowl and how to balance the need to conserve water while protecting our “urban forest.”

District 3

John Kennedy [incumbent]

Kennedy was born and raised in Pasadena, he served as Student Body President at Blair High School and Student Senator at the University of Southern California, where he received dual degrees in International Relations and Economics. He earned a Juris Doctor Degree from Howard University School of Law. Kennedy was elected to the Council in 2013.

He currently serves on the Finance Committee, is Chair of the Public Safety Committee, and is one of three City representatives to the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority. Having worked for the City of Pasadena in the Finance, City Attorney, Police, and Public Works Departments, he also served on a variety of Boards including the Pasadena Police Foundation, Tom Bradley Legacy Foundation at UCLA, Library Task Force for Alternate Funding, the Community Health Alliance of Pasadena, Community Development Committee, and the Developers’ Selection Committee for Heritage Square Senior Housing Development.

Kennedy drafted the initial documents for, and championed the creation of, the Community Oversight Commission of the Pasadena Police Department and was the chief advocate for Body Worn Cameras. During the pandemic, Kennedy was instrumental in securing grants for businesses to help them survive COVID-19, as well as an eviction moratorium and proposed relocation benefits for displaced renters. One of his main priorities is to house the un-housed and marginally housed residents. Toward that end he is making certain that 1,000 units will be built in 1,000 days thus facilitating the building of thousands of units of affordable housing and low-income housing. He also led the City to agree to a policy statement that guaranteed low-income housing would be equitably distributed throughout the geographic boundaries of the City.

For Kennedy clean and safe water is a high priority and he was a major force in promoting the project to replace the unsafe Sunset Reservoirs thereby providing cleaner drinking water and diminishing Pasadena’s reliance on outside water supplies.

Brandon Lamar

Lamar’s life has been focused on public/community service, and community engagement. He has been involved in Pasadena since his youth, being a part of Pasadena’s own programs such as Pasadena Youth Ambassadors, Pasadena Youth Council, Pasadena Alpha Phi Alpha Mentoring program, Pasadena Vision 20/20 initiative, and many more.

Brandon studied at Azusa Pacific college. Later on, he became a steering committee member of Vision 20/20, a community advisor for Day One Pasadena, and assisted in the start-up of the La Pinto esca Teen Center and Pasadena Parks After-Dark programs. Lamar is now the Chair of the Human Relations Commission and serves on the Executive Boards of Pasadena NAACP, Pasadena Organizing for Progress, Leadership Pasadena, and Black Los Angeles Young Democrats.

While the two candidates differ greatly in education and experience levels, their views are similar other than on rent control. Lamar favors rent control while Kennedy does not believe it is a viable solution and thinks it only leads to further housing issues down the line. Rather Kennedy’s emphasis, as is consistent with his record, is on how to

provide affordable housing. At least one of the committee members was put off by the fact that John answered that “he did not consider himself an environmentalist” when asked the question on how to balance water conservation with protection of our urban forest. Some of us thought he simply meant that it was beyond his area of expertise. Lamar did not have any answer to the question either. We all liked Lamar and some people voted no on the motion to recommend Kennedy because they did not want to discourage Lamar from continuing his good work, others voted no because they just favor de-facto term limits, and at least one person voted no because he thought discussion was cut off too soon. Those of us who favored Kennedy valued his qualifications, his dedication and good record over the years.

The Research Committee voted 7-6-0 to recommend the endorsement of John Kennedy.

The Steering Committee voted 24-1-0 to recommend the endorsement of John Kennedy.

District 7

Allen Shay without notice failed to appear for his scheduled interview.

Ciran Hadjian appeared for her interview but declined to be interviewed because one of the persons participating in the interview had already endorsed another candidate and that person’s participation was, from her perspective, “unethical.” Attempts by the chair and by other members to explain our by-laws to her and reassure her she would be given due consideration were unsuccessful. Our view was “too bad for Ciran.” Even people who may have supported her lost all respect for her as a candidate who was so easily intimidated by the mere presence of one very polite member.

Jason Lyon

Lyon attended UCLA School of Law, where he was a member of the Law Review, and graduated Order of the Coif, among other honors. He began his legal career as an associate at Latham & Watkins. Lyon moved to California more than 20 years ago and was elected to the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council in 2003. In 2004, Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn appointed him to the East Los Angeles Area Planning Commission. In 2006, Jason was appointed to L.A.’s blue-ribbon Neighborhood Council Review Commission and elected Vice Chair.

In 2006, Lyon’s son began attending preschool in Pasadena and Lyon at that point committed himself to serving our community. During that time, he served in various volunteer capacities for Pacific Oaks School. After settling here permanently in 2010, Lyon joined the board of directors of Young & Healthy, a nonprofit dedicated to providing Pasadena’s uninsured and under-served children access to high-quality health care at no cost to their families. He served as its president for two years, during which time he oversaw the establishment of a fund to ensure the organization’s long-term fiscal security. Lyon was elected to the Vestry of All Saints Church and became its senior lay leader in 2016. In that capacity, he oversaw the parish’s transition from retiring rector Ed Bacon to Mike Kinman. In 2018, Lyon joined the board of the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership, which works to advance the economic vitality and quality of life in our region. That same year, he accepted a seat on the board of Planned Parenthood Pasadena San Gabriel Valley. Lyon was appointed to Pasadena’s Historic Preservation Commission in 2017. During his term on the commission, he worked to update the city’s ordinance limiting demolition of historic homes. In 2019, Council member Andy Wilson appointed Jason to the city Planning Commission. Lyon currently serves as the Vice Chair of both the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals. Jason is endorsed by Anthony Portantino, and Jack Scott, among others.

In answers to our questions, Lyon favors police oversight, establishing a community standard for our police department and ensuring that they adhere to that standard. He favors rent control, if the voters want it, as a tool for protecting tenants, and the conversion of motel and office space to provide affordable housing and house the homeless. He supports the increase of additional dwelling units but does not approve of the state’s solution of unchecked development which he believes will destroy the character of our neighborhoods and will only result in more luxury housing as opposed to affordable housing. He states that we need a thoughtful, sensible housing strategy, directing new development to major transit corridors, adapting existing buildings to residential uses, and expanding infrastructure to accommodate these changes. Solutions for the homeless problem should target the specific reasons that people in our community become homeless.

In the most recent census of unhoused individuals, more than half of the people experiencing homelessness had lived in Pasadena for more than 20 years. Many of these folks are not suffering from chronic mental health or addiction issues, and they are not chronically homeless. They are falling out of housing because they can no longer

afford to live in this city. We need to expand our case worker team so they can build one-on-one relationships with folks living on the street and address their specific needs and get them off the street into long-term housing.

The fight against climate change has to begin at the personal, local level. Pasadena should be a leader in the fight. Not only can we assist with the global cause, but we can also improve air quality right here at home and reduce the pollution that causes harm to our residents. We should move aggressively to reduce our carbon footprint, expand the urban forest and reduce heat islands, incentivize conservation, expand food waste recycling, and undertake rigorous environmental analysis of all new developments in the city.

The Research Committee voted 13-0-0 to recommend the endorsement of Jason Lyon.

The Steering Committee voted 24-0-0 to recommend the endorsement of Jason Lyon.

Los Angeles County Sheriff

The interviews for Los Angeles Sheriff were attended by George Brumder, Karen Breau, Beth Gertmenian, Susan Kane, Jeanette Mann, Marilee Marshall, Barbara Paul, Denise Robb, George Van Alstine, Ed Washatka, Tim Wendler, and Bruce Wright. (12) All candidates were invited, or reasonable efforts were made to invite them; the candidates who accepted our invitation are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

Incumbent **Alex Villanueva** and Los Angeles Airport Police Chief **Cecil Rhambo** did not respond to our invitation. Retired LASD Captain **Matthew Rodriguez**, responded but declined to interview saying he was the only Republican in the race and his platform was not consistent with our progressive organization.

Candidates were asked questions about how the sheriff should interact with the Board of Supervisors, the Civilian Oversight Commission, the Inspector General and the District Attorney. They were also asked if they believed gangs still existed among the rank and file and what efforts could be made to clean them up.

All of the candidates expressed that, unlike the present sheriff, they would follow the law, cooperate as appropriate with the above entities and would clean up the gangs that they all acknowledge exist among the rank and file. Initially we all agreed that any of the candidates would be a tremendous improvement over the present sheriff. We focused our discussion on their respective qualifications, and who would be most likely to beat Villanueva and effectively run the department.

Robert Luna

Luna recently completed service as Long Beach Chief of Police, capping a 36-year career. He grew up in East Los Angeles, in a poor Latino immigrant family. Luna started as a reserve officer in 1985 and rose through the ranks. He was appointed Chief of Police in 2014 and recently served on the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) executive board, and is active with the organization's Homeland Security Committee and the Police Executive Leadership Institute (PELI) mentorship program. He is also a Rambo graduate of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Executive Institute and National Academy, and Harvard University's program for senior executives in state and local government, and the University of Southern California's (USC) Delinquency Control Institute. Luna has a master's in public administration from Cal State Long Beach.

April Saucedo Hood

Hood has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from California State University, Dominguez Hills. She is currently a parole agent.

Eli Vera

Vera graduated from Union Institute and University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Management. He is a 32-year veteran of the LASD, promoted to the rank of Chief. However, Vera was notified in September, via a brief letter from Villanueva, that he was being demoted from a chief to a commander. A sheriff's department spokesperson told the Los Angeles Times that it was an "unapologetic move" made to keep Villanueva's competitor out of confidential meetings that the sheriff regularly holds with senior staff.

Vera has served in various capacities and positions of leadership throughout his career with the Department. He is currently assigned to Technology and Support Division where he oversees the Communications and Fleet Management Bureau, Data Systems Bureau, Records and Identification Bureau, and Scientific Services Bureau — totaling to roughly a \$250 million dollar budget.

Britta Steinbrenner

Steinbrenner holds a Master of Business Administration Degree and Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administration/Management both received from the University of La Verne, along with an Associate of Arts Degree from Santa Monica City College. As Captain of the County Services Bureau (CSB), her responsibilities were to oversee a 450 person staff who provide building security and law enforcement services for six county hospitals, 85 libraries and 320 county buildings with oversight of a \$130 million dollar contract, two private security guard contracts and the 700 guards who augment those security services.

Eric Strong

Strong was born and raised in L.A. County where he attended St. John Bosco High School, and the University of California at Los Angeles. He also served in the United States Marine Corps. Strong began his career in public safety in 1993, following in his father's footsteps as an officer for the Compton Police Department. He is a graduate of the FBI National Academy and currently serves as a Captain in the Sheriff's Department.

Initially it was noted that any of the candidates would be a most welcome change from our present sheriff. They all expressed disdain for Villanueva's policies, his refusal to follow the law or address the issue of deputy gangs, and his efforts to turn the Department against elected and appointed officials even to the point of weaponizing things like COVID vaccine mandates. In our deliberations we were guided by what we agreed was an unusually urgent need to back a candidate who could defeat Villanueva. We were very impressed with Luna and initially thought bringing in an outsider was the best way to go. We were concerned, however, that it would take too long for an outsider to become familiar with the practices and culture of the Department. Of course, in the abstract we also liked the idea of a first female sheriff. We did not really consider Hood because she presently lacks sufficient relevant experience. We felt that Steinbrenner was somewhat qualified but lacked the financial backing to be a serious contender. We also liked Strong but, in the end, we moved to Vera. Vera is undoubtedly well qualified and his presentation caused most of us to conclude that his life and work experiences made him the best suited for the job. Vera, whose family are Cuban immigrants, grew up in Section 8 Housing in Los Angeles. He has worked patrol in South Los Angeles, overseen two divisions, has been a SWAT commander, and has overseen important investigations such as the de-escalation of force in the County Jail. Although his background reveals he is a competent law enforcement officer and can be tough when needed, he also presented as a caring individual. For example, he talked about how on two occasions he and his wife fostered children with whom he came into contact on service calls, one of whom he later adopted. He also spoke about how we need to get young people out of the system and into rehabilitation.

The Research Committee voted 10-0-2 to recommend the endorsement of Eli Vera.

The Steering Committee voted 24-0-1 to recommend the endorsement of El Vera.

Pasadena City College Board of Trustees

The Research Committee considered candidates for Pasadena City College Districts 5, 7 and 3. In District 1, our previously endorsed candidate, **Sandra Chen Lau**, was running unopposed. We hope she will accept our invitation to address the Steering Committee after the election. The meeting was attended by George Brumder, Jon Fuhrman, Beth Gertmenian, Jeanette Mann, Marilee Marshall, Julie Martinez, Barbara Paul, Denise Robb, Tim Wendler, and Bruce Wright. (10)

All the candidates are Democrats. They were asked how they would address the rocky relationship between the faculty association and the Board, as evidenced by the fact that three incumbents were being challenged and the faculty association is backing each of the challengers. They were also asked how they would address the challenges in returning to in-person learning; the disparity between the percentage of college ready students who completed a degree in six years and non-college ready students who did not; how to increase the numbers of African American and Latino students and faculty; and how to address food and housing insecurity for poverty ridden students.

District 5 (San Marino, South Pasadena, Temple City)

Linda Wah [incumbent]

Wah was initially appointed to the Board in 2010 and successfully ran for reelection in 2011 and 2015. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Information Systems and a Masters of Business Administration from California State Los Angeles. During her years on the Board, she helped to promote the availability of community college classes in high schools through the establishment of "Dual Enrollment." This program accelerates college completion by enabling high school students to enroll at Pasadena City College. Wah has been a strong advocate of

the Pasadena City College Promise program which provides two years of tuition free education for all first-time, full-time students, regardless of age, income or immigration status. She has also advocated for veterans.

Kristina Kwong

Kwong, a graduate of McGeorge School of Law, was admitted to the State Bar in 1992. She is a lifelong resident of South Pasadena and current chair of South Pasadena Parks and Recreation. Kwong believes many members of the Board have been in office too long and have become complacent. According to Kwong, the problems at PCC are due to failed leadership. As an education lawyer, she has years of experience working to improve schools and universities. She has provided educators, faculty, and administrators with essential information regarding compliance with legal issues and regulations, contracts, and employee relations. The present Board management has too often failed to consider the concerns of faculty and staff. These avoidable tensions between faculty and management have caused significant problems in hiring and employee retention. The safety and security of the students and faculty in returning to in person learning is an ongoing concern.

Kwong will foster a strong relationship with all stakeholders that is built on trust and respect. She is also a strong advocate of Dual enrollment which allows high school students to take classes for college credit. She is committed to meeting with high school counselors and administrators to expand dual enrollment and increase opportunities for all of our students.

The Research Committee voted 9-1 -0 to recommend the endorsement of Kristina Kwong.

The Steering Committee voted 19-3-3 to recommend the endorsement of Kristina Kwong.

District 7 (Arcadia and Temple City)

Anthony Fellow [incumbent]

Fellow was first elected to the Board in 2009. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. He is a professor of Communications at California State University, Fullerton where he has worked for 28 years both as an administrator and professor. He teaches courses in media history, media law and media and politics. In addition, he was an adjunct professor in USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism for five years.

Alton Wang

Wang grew up in Arcadia and attended Arcadia's public schools. In 2016 he obtained a BA from Wesleyan with a double major in sociology and government. His government concentration was in American politics. Alton believes that you need a strong relationship between the board, the faculty and the administration. He is proud that he is endorsed by not just by the faculty association but by student leaders. The process of returning to in-person class needs to be smoother and not create boundaries. The transition is still in progress as we see what happens with COVID. Everyone needs to be kept safe and be prepared for another wave.

Wang has continuously worked to open as many doors for others as were opened for him and his family. Alton's parents were immigrants and both attended PCC. As an organizer, and a Democrat, he helped drive record voter turnout among Asian American communities in California and across the nation. Alton promises to expand student success and promote community-oriented governance that prioritizes listening and engagement.

Those of us who supported Wang agreed with one of our members who started the conversation by simply stating "I think Fellow has been on the Board too long." Unlike Wang, Fellow appeared lacking in enthusiasm, blamed the recent problems on the faculty not wanting to do their jobs, and did not see any issues about the transition back to in-person learning.

The Research Committee voted 6-4-0 to recommend the endorsement of Alton Wang

The Steering Committee voted 21-3-1 to recommend the endorsement of Alton Wang.

District 3 (Northwest Pasadena)

Steve Gibson

In 2010, Gibson, who was a returning student, graduated from Pasadena City College with an AA in communications. He subsequently obtained his BA and Masters of Science in communications from California State Northridge followed by a PhD in Education from UCLA. He has lived in District for 16 years.

The most important issues for Gibson are accountability and helping to restore the relationship between the faculty and the Board. Open discussions are needed in order to find common ground using a mediator if necessary. Gibson noted that his district has the highest percentage of people of color and there needs to be an active program put in place to address the loss of enrollment especially among Black males.

Gibson believes there should be community forums to help bring in more students, representatives of PCC should visit high schools, speak to guidance counselors and address student groups to encourage them to come to PCC. Food anxiety could be addressed through the cafeteria and housing needs to be looked at and discussed as well.

Berlinda Brown [incumbent]

Berlinda Brown was first elected to the PCC Board in 2009 to represent Trustee Area 3, which covers Northwest Pasadena. Brown holds a B.A. from California State University Dominguez Hills. She is committed to helping students graduate in a timely fashion for careers that help them achieve personal goals and benefit the nation's economy.

Before retiring, Brown worked as a health care professional for the Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center for more than 30 years. She credits her experience at the medical center in molding her belief in society's need for a well-educated and career-ready workforce. In her earlier days on the Board Brown championed the establishment of a PCC Satellite program at John Muir High School.

Brown has served on the East Arroyo Neighborhood Association Board of Directors and is currently serving on the Pasadena General Plan Update Advisory Committee.

Compared to Gibson, Brown fared poorly. She seemed out of touch with present day problems. She blamed the faculty for the "rocky relationship." The return to in-person learning has "already been accomplished" and she was not aware of any challenges to its implementation now or going forward. She did not even know there was a pantry which gives out food to students, let alone that it had closed during COVID or have any ideas how food distribution could be improved.

The Research Committee voted 9-1-0 to recommend the endorsement of Steve Gibson

The Steering Committee voted 19-3-1 to recommend the endorsement of Steve Gibson.

Los Angeles County Assessor

Jeffrey Prang [incumbent]

The Research and Steering Committees unanimously voted to recommend the endorsement of previously endorsed candidate Jeffrey Prang.

Board of Equalization

Tony Vasquez [incumbent]

The Research and Steering Committees unanimously voted to recommend the endorsement of Tony Vasquez.

Statewide Constitutional Offices

The Research and Steering Committees unanimously voted to recommend the endorsement of **all the incumbent Democrats**.

Congress

The Research and Steering Committees unanimously voted to recommend the endorsement of our previously endorsed candidates, **Judy Chu** and **Adam Schiff**.

State Assembly

The Research and Steering Committees unanimously voted to recommend the endorsement of our previously endorsed candidate, **Chris Holden**.