



# From the City Manager's Desk

a weekly report from Scott Ochoa, City of Monrovia



October 12, 2007

## *City Council Meeting Preview*

As promised, the days of short Council meetings are gone for awhile. The October 16 City Council meeting is packed with a number of interesting and important agenda items.

But first, a bit of inspiration and good news: The Pledge of Allegiance will be led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Matthew Stern, US Army, who is recently returned home. Following the Pledge, the City Council will proclaim (under PR-1) October 17 as Matthew Stern Day in Monrovia, in honor of Lt. Stern's service to America.

PR-2 is a proclamation in recognition of Make a Difference Day in Monrovia on October 27; and PR-3 is the recognition of the winners of the 2007 Halloween Home Decorating Contest.

We have several Public Hearings on the agenda. PH-1 is the continuation of the July 17 public hearing to consider the 2006-07 LA County weed abatement charges. You may recall that the City Council continued this item from the summer because of errors contained in the County's list. Since that time, the City has moved to terminate the nuisance abatement contract with the County effective January 1, 2008. Thus, this item – featuring a corrected list – is really a bit of housekeeping to help close out the relationship with the County Department of Agriculture. Staff is recommending approval.

The next three Public Hearings are the considerations of Historic Landmark status and Mills Acts on the following properties: 419 West Lime (PH-2); 214-216 North Encinitas (PH-3); and 344 North Melrose (PH-4). Although all three properties are deserving of the respective designations, 214-216 North Encinitas is especially satisfying because this property was slated for demolition last year; yet due to the guidelines and consultations mandated in the City's Preservation Ordinance, the structure was saved and restored. Staff is recommending approval of all three items.

PH-5 is the consideration of a tentative tract map and conditional use permit (CUP) for a proposed four-unit planned unit development (PUD) at 309 Violet Avenue. This private development features the construction of four single-family units on a long, rectangular piece of property (50'x302'). The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of single and multiple-family residences. At the Planning Commission hearing, one neighbor did express concern regarding privacy issues due to the proposed second story windows. The Commission directed that changes be made to the size and location of such windows to alleviate these concerns. Staffing is recommending approval.

Lastly, PH-6 is the consideration of a tentative tract map and CUP to convert an existing 32-unit apartment complex into condominiums. The site is located at 1415 Alamos Avenue. The proposed project meets the stated zoning requirements to complete such a conversion. Although the Planning Commission had concerns about certain types of amenities (for example, could the City require that each condo unit have its own washer/dryer hook-ups?), State law generally does not grant a great deal of specificity to municipalities' police powers in these types of matters. The larger concern from City staff is that this project would eliminate 32 quality rental units that contribute to the City's overall housing mix. On the other hand, this project enhances the home ownership opportunities in town.

Based on the proposed project's compliance with relevant Building Codes and Zoning laws, staff is recommending approval.

Under City Councilmember Reports, Councilman Adams will introduce the effort undertaken to open City Hall on Saturday, October 27. Councilman Garcia will discuss a generous donation from the Monrovia Historic Preservation Group to help with the refurbishment of the Monrovia Historical Museum. Following the acceptance of the kind donation, Public Works Director David Fike will provide a brief overview on the status of the Capital Improvements Program initiated by the Council last year.

Under Administrative Reports, item AR-1 is the 12-month evaluation of the Monrovia Area Partnership program (MAP) that was authorized by the Council last year. You will recall that MAP was the concerted effort by the City to combat not only the effects of gangs and drugs, but also the neighborhood blight that facilitates the advent of such criminal activity. Also, rather than spread resources so thin that the impact is diluted, MAP is focused on a specific, geographically bound area in the southeast quadrant of the City (MAP Area #1). In addition to a brief presentation, staff has produced a short video that will highlight all of the specific achievements of this program. We have observed a great deal of progress in MAP Area #1 over the last 12 months, and staff is recommending that the program continue and be expanded into MAP Area #2 – the neighborhoods surrounding Recreation Park.

Item AR-2 is the report of findings of the Monrovia Ad Hoc Citywide Parking Committee, which was appointed by the City Council 11 months ago. Essentially, the Council charged this Committee with identifying and discussing a number of vexing problems pertaining to parking and traffic in residential neighborhoods. The Committee outlined four basic issues: Parking problems associated with the rental/use of the Monrovia Historical Museum and other unique sites; parking and traffic problems around school sites; parking problems associated with the parking of RV's in residential areas; and, a perceived lack of handicapped parking in public and private parking lots.

While consensus was reached on most topics, not surprisingly the topic that generated the most debate was the RV parking. The Committee's debate and dialogue – both among its members and with the residents who gave testimony at the "roving" meetings around town – illustrates the difficult nature of these types of problems. That is, generally, where you stand depends on where you sit. In the end, the Committee focused on an overall solution to this matter by recommending that the City adopt a "no overnight" parking ordinance on public streets. Although staff argued against this alternative along several lines of reasoning, the Committee was fairly resolute. Thus, the staff report reflects both the Committee's recommendation and the staff recommendation regarding parking issues in Monrovia – the basic difference being the "no overnight" parking issue.

Item AR-3 is both an update on the status of the Monrovia Corporate Yard Renovation Project, and a request for funding for Phase 2 of the project. Last December, the City Council authorized a contract with H.C. Olsen Construction for the renovation of the Corporate Yard Building. The project contemplated the creation of new offices and workstations on a second floor of the existing building. This work is nearing completion ahead of schedule and, combined with all of the other building expenses (cabinetry, office furniture, etc.), within 5% of the original project budget.

At this point, staff is requesting the Council's approval for Phase 2 of the project – the exterior, grounds and flat work. Specifically, staff is recommending a painting contract of \$16,148 for the building exterior from West Coast Painting; a paving contract of \$40,350 to Western States Paving for the egress road onto Lemon Avenue; and a contract to purchase rolling gates for \$19,800 from Raffi's Metal Design to secure this proposed roadway. As with Phase 1, funds to pay for this work are available in the Water and Sewer Fund reserves, with each Public Works Division being assessed via

inter-fund transfer to reimburse the respective Reserve funds in future years. Staff is recommending approval.

Lastly, AR-3 is an award of contract for the development of bid documents for the Chantry Flats Road repair project to B&E Engineers in the amount of \$36,948. As you may know, a portion of Chantry Flats Road is located in the incorporated city limits of the City of Monrovia. Much of this road, including Monrovia's segment, was washed out by the heavy rains during the winter of 2004-05. The Cities of Monrovia, Arcadia and Sierra Madre were able to secure funding from FEMA to design and make repairs to this roadway. This award of contract is the first step in this direction. Ultimately, the three cities have developed the consensus to turn the maintenance of the road over to the County of Los Angeles, which is the only local governmental agency that has any practical use for the road. Staff is recommending approval.

As always, if you have any question about any item on the Agenda, please feel free to contact me directly.

### **Restaurant Changes at Huntington Oaks**

This week, we received notice that Spires Restaurant (located at Monterey and West Huntington Drive in the Huntington Oaks Shopping Center) would be closing its doors, and that the Center's owner would be replacing the restaurant with another food use. The City came by the information from a concerned senior citizen. Spires is popular with seniors because of the menu prices and offerings.

The senior who brought this matter to our attention expressed frustration, believing the closure of her favorite restaurant was the City's doing, and thus the City obviously must not care about senior issues or concerns. Quite the contrary, the City does indeed care about the senior community (as evidenced by the multitude of programs, events and activities offered to this key segment of the community) and in fact, the closure of the Spires Restaurant is the result of a private business negotiation between the restaurant's owner and the owner of the shopping center.

City staff has contacted the shopping center owner and requested that, in considering a new tenant for the site, he take into account users that would be appealing to the senior demographic. It is a private business decision, and the City has little discretion in the matter; however, we want to impress on the ownership the needs and consumer loyalty of Monrovia seniors.

### **Gold Line Getting Some Attention from LA? (Finally)**

We have received word that, on the heels of recent discussions among Gold Line Construction Authority officials and representatives of the Mayor of Los Angeles, that LA City may be finally be recognizing both the region's interest and its own interest in bringing the Gold Line through the San Gabriel Valley and out to San Bernardino County – specifically to Ontario Airport.

Obviously, the entire 210 Corridor benefits by bringing the Gold Line east of Pasadena. The population growth in the Inland Empire demands the construction of effective and efficient mass transit. Yet the MTA, which is dominated by the City of LA, has consistently rejected projects (no matter how cost-effective) in favor of projects in line with their LA-centric focus...hopefully, until now.

Recognizing that Los Angeles International Airport is wholly congested and expansion of LAX is fraught with political and legal challenges, Mayor Villaraigosa may have come to realize that the answer to getting more flights into the Los Angeles metropolitan area is through Ontario. It should be noted here that Los Angeles World Airports (i.e., the City of LA) controls both LAX and Ontario. Thus, if the volume of flights into Ontario is to expand dramatically over the next decade, shouldn't the MTA be anticipating and building for that eventuality? Moreover, shouldn't we be trying to avoid the

mistakes of the past, like building a light rail that does not quite make to a major airport (ala the Green Line)? I truly hope and expect that this could be the last bit of common sense that opens MTA's eyes to the practicality of operating the Gold Line, once it is built.

### **Public Defender Issuing Subpoenas**

Recently, we have seen the Public Defender's office employ a new tactic in criminal cases initiated by our Police Department. Rather than obtaining evidence through the normal process set out in the Penal Code by working through the District Attorney's office, public defenders have recently issued subpoenas to the Police Department directly. This is problematic in that it violates the normal rules for criminal cases and it bypasses the prosecutor. Also, this new tactic would require extra court appearances by officers under invalid subpoenas. The City Attorney's office has objected to this tactic informally to the Public Defender's office to no avail. The City Attorney will now be making formal objections in court in an effort to force the Public Defender to follow the established rules of discovery. While we have no objection to providing relevant evidence in cases initiated by the Monrovia PD, we believe strongly that the Public Defender's office should comply with the established rules in these matters, in cooperation with the District Attorney.

### **Articles Attached**

- **Gold Line Extension Possible.**

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### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

#### Filming

- ABC Television will be back filming scenes for the series October Road on Thursday, October 11. They will be using several locations in our downtown including the 500 block of South Myrtle, Library Park, Planet Cookies, the apartment building at 130 E. Colorado and the alley at the rear of the east side of the 600 block of South Myrtle. They will be filming from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. There will be occasional two-minute traffic control on Myrtle and Colorado.
- Dina Zugec, a student at Loyola Marymount University, will be filming a student project at 331 Bradbury Road on Saturday, October 20 from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. The scenes will be of characters at the pool in the rear yard of this property. A film liaison will be on-site during filming hours.

#### October 10 Planning Commission Meeting Recap

- This item was being continued to the October 23 Special Planning Commission Meeting for the Amendment to the 700 S. Myrtle Avenue Specific Plan, Tentative Tract Map No. 063146, Conditional Use Permit CUP 2005-22, Urban Housing Partners, applicants.
- The Planning Commission unanimously approved a Conditional Use Permit for the conversion of a residential duplex to an office use located at 315 S. Primrose Avenue. Six parking spaces will be provided at the rear of the lot in the RH (Residential High Density) Zone.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES HAPPENINGS**

### **RECREATION DIVISION**

Empower 2 Purpose. The Second Annual Girl Power Conference will be held on Saturday, October 27 from 2 to 7 p.m. at the Monrovia Community Center. City Council Member Mary Ann Lutz will lead a session on *How to be a World Changer*. Breakout sessions will highlight *Image, Money Smarts and Fitness*. Celebrity keynote speaker Rose Espinoza will focus on overcoming adversity and learning to become leaders. The \$10 cost includes souvenir gift bags, buffet dinner and entertainment. For registration information, visit [www.empower2purpose.com](http://www.empower2purpose.com) or call (626) 404-6740. The program is hosted and organized by Empower 2 Purpose Inc. founder and CEO Tamala Kelly.

Mary Wilcox Youth Center Closure. The Mary Wilcox Youth Center will become the temporary home of the Monrovia Public Library while the new Library building is being built. In order to prepare for the Library's transition, the Youth Center will close its doors effective October 15. For more information contact the Department of Community Services at (626) 256.8246.

Monrovia Youth Commission Hits the Ground Running. Fall is a very busy time of year for the Youth Commission. The weekend of October 6 and 7, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., 37 Commissioners volunteered at the Celebrate the Arts Festival, providing assistance with set-up and clean-up. Over the next few weeks, the Youth Commission will be assisting with three major community events including the Volunteer Center of the San Gabriel Valley's Annual Make a Difference Day and Community Services' annual Haunted Hike, Halloween Carnival and Costume Contest. For program information contact the Department of Community Services at 626.256.8246.

### **LIBRARY DIVISION**

Announcing the Birth of Baby Storytime. Programming for Youth Services now serves children of all ages with the addition of Baby Storytime. This new program features 15 minutes of songs and stories geared specifically for parent and infant. Annette Simpson, Librarian II, will present one session a week that meets at 10:15 a.m. (directly before the Tuesday session of Time for Twos). The program has had a great response from the public.

Thursday Afterschool Special On Thursday, October 18, at 3:45 p.m., the dynamic team of Lorrie Oshatz and Theresa Amy will blend folk tales, fables and rhymes into a frothy brew in their presentation *Monsters and Spiders and Ghouls, Oh My!* Using a pinch of spookiness, a dash of the macabre and just the right dose of laughter, this spine-tingling presentation of interactive storytelling will be sure to captivate any audience from kindergartners to grandparents.

Teen Scene. Join us...IF YOU DARE!!! The Monrovia Public Library will host its Second Annual *Murder Mystery Party* for Halloween. The party will be held on Monday, October 22 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. If you are in grades 7-12 and would like to take part in this who-done-it, please call Pam at 626-256-8275 by October 19 to reserve your spot. Everyone who RSVPs will have a part and everyone will be a suspect. Who knows, you could be the culprit.

Youth Services Programming Update. Because of the impending move, both Great Adventurers and Best Books started meeting in September instead of October. However, attendance at both programs have held steady. Because of the upcoming Library move, Annette Simpson, Librarian II, is running a four-week session of Great Adventurers instead of the usual six. In Best Books, Shawn Thrasher, Senior Librarian, read all of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in October and started reading Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*.

All storytimes, including baby storytime and Best Books, will go on hiatus for the duration of the move to temporary quarters. As soon as possible, these programs will resume at the Mary Wilcox Center. Afterschool Specials, Teen Scene, and Saturday Specials will be moved to locations throughout the community.

## **FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Personnel responded to 69 emergency calls from 0800 hours October 3 to 0800 hours October 7. Significant incidents include:

Multiple Victim Traffic Collision. Saturday morning at 0400 hrs., E102 responded to a single vehicle traffic collision on the westbound 210 freeway at Huntington Drive. Upon arrival, Firefighters found a vehicle with major damage and six persons outside of the vehicle. The driver apparently fell asleep while returning from a party. Firefighters began treating the patients and it was determined that four of the patients met trauma center criteria. Firefighters were assisted with units from Arcadia Fire. Two patients were transported to Huntington Memorial for trauma and two additional were transported to LA County USC for trauma as well.

## **TRAINING AND SAFETY**

The Monrovia Fire Department training division sponsored one member this week to participate in Urban Search and Rescue, Confined Space Operational training. Firefighter/Paramedic John Rivas will be representing the Fire Department this week in this very specialized training. The class is being conducted in Los Angeles and taught by state certified instructors from the Los Angeles Fire Department. We wish John lots of luck and look forward to using his newly acquired expertise at some point in the near future.

Santa Ana College has begun its annual Fitness and Wellness classes and testing evaluations for 2007. Introduction and registration classes began this week. The focus of this week's health and wellness introduction focused on the digestive system and the physiological signs and symptoms of stress. In the following weeks, members of the Department will participate in several more training classes, and eventually be given full blood screening and physical fitness tests.

## **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

1<sup>st</sup> CERT Class Graduation. On Saturday, October 6, the first Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class completed training at Fire Station 2. CERT members were trained in the areas of disaster medical, building search and shoring, fire safety and disaster psychology. This classroom training was conducted over three Saturdays and concluded with a scenario in the training tower. This scenario allowed the CERT members to get a hands-on chance to practice the skills they had been taught in a simulated disaster. Captain Brad Dover and the CERT trainers Engineer Jeremy Sanchez, FF/PM Ken Struckus, FF/PM Todd Lambert, FF/PM Dave Phillips and FF Randy Towns already have more CERT classes scheduled for next year.

## **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS COMMUNITY FORUM**

Thursday, October 18, the Fire Department will be hosting a community forum in the Council Chambers from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mr. Goltz, a guest speaker from Cal Tech, will provide a brief presentation based on a 6.5 magnitude earthquake scenario originating on the Raymond fault. Computer models have been developed for Monrovia that illustrate realistic impacts on our City. Following Mr. Goltz' presentation, the Monrovia CERT program will be discussed and then a question and answer period will be opened to the public.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

This has been a busy week with Fire Prevention week activities, finishing touches to the fire station and the first CERT class graduation. FF/PM BJ Scott and Dave Phillips have been hard at work providing fire safety talks to local elementary schools and senior citizen housing complex. In the past this program was delivered to school children only, but this year we have expanded to include seniors. The safety talks have been well received and my thanks to FF/PM's Scott and Phillips for their efforts.

On the topic of thanks, the firefighters have been hard at work finishing up the kitchen and getting functional. Captain Ryan Phillips, Engineer Steve Mikity and the troops have been hard at work and their efforts paid off with the first meal served in the renovated station Wednesday night.

Finally, congratulations go out to Captain Dover and his CERT team for graduating the first class last Saturday. Monrovia CERT Class 1 will be publicly acknowledged during the November 6 City Council meeting, but in the meantime, good job Captain Dover!!

## ON THE POLICE BLOTTER

During the last seven day period, the Police Department handled 549 calls for service resulting in 115 investigations. Following are this week's highlighted issues and events:

Burglary Arrest of Parolee at Large. On October 10 at 10:04 a.m., police received a call of a suspicious person in a residential backyard in the 1600 block of Alhambra. A resident saw a shadow pass by his window. He looked out and observed a male adult in his backyard. The suspect said he was being chased by several other male subjects and asked the resident to see if the subjects were out front. When the resident went to check, the suspect entered the house. The resident's wife was inside the house also and apparently scared off the suspect, who took off running. The residents called police.

As an officer was responding to the call, he observed a subject matching the suspect's description. This subject saw the officer and took off running. The officer followed the suspect in his police unit. The suspect was running back and forth across the street erratically to elude the police unit. The suspect ran until he tired and came to almost a complete stop, then he suddenly changed direction and started running toward the police car. The officer turned sharply to avoid striking the suspect and turned into a driveway that was closed off by a chain link fence. The suspect ran into the left front quarter panel and fell on the hood of the police unit. The officer exited the unit and took the suspect into custody. No one was injured.

The suspect turned out to be a parolee at large who is believed to be responsible for several recent burglaries. The suspect was booked for burglary and a parole hold for him was obtained. Investigation continuing.

# THE PUBLIC WORKS **SCOOP**



## **ADMINISTRATION:**

New Home for Public Works. The Department of Public Works is Moving! Please be patient during our transition while we move our office from City Hall on Thursday, October 11 and Friday, October 12 to our new home, The City Yard, 600 South Mountain Avenue. We will be open for business at The City Yard on Monday, October 15. All phone numbers will remain the same, and you can contact us at our general number 626-932-5575 for any assistance. We look forward to assisting you at our new location.

New Stars and Stripes on Huntington Drive: The old weathered American flags have been replaced and new American Flags are now flying proudly on Huntington Drive.

## **ENGINEERING:**

### Grading Plan Check Projects

- 803 E. Huntington Drive - Tenant Improvement, office space, first plan check
- 323 Heliotrope - Hospital, second plan check, corrections returned
- California/Monrovia/Duarte - 20 Planned Unit Development Project, second Plan Check, Corrections Returned
- 303 Elfwood - single family home, third plan check, corrections returned

### Approved Grading Plans:

- 1419 S. Myrtle - New commercial project

### Public Works Inspections:

- Colorado Commons: On site drainage/underground conduits. Alley trash enclosures, preliminary alley grading for low retaining walls.
- Duarte Road between 5th and Encino - AT&T cabinet and electrical panel installations, underground conduit inspections
- 825 W. Duarte Road, Street resurfacing of utility trenches
- 1825 10th Avenue, Street resurfacing of utility trenches
- 22 Hidden Valley, Pool and retaining walls
- 1402 S. California, Erosion control measures for site demolition activities.

### Construction Documents:

- Colorado Commons Street Improvements - preparation for street improvements

## **OPERATIONS – Environmental – Facilities – Parks:**

Free Composting Workshop. On Saturday, October 20, a free composting workshop will be held at the Monrovia's Library Park Bandshell, 321 S. Myrtle Avenue, from 9 to 11 a.m. Attendees will learn about the proper tools and techniques necessary to efficiently reuse available resources such as grass clippings and leaves. For more information, please call Environmental Services at (626) 932-5553 or 5556 or log onto [www.smartgardening.com](http://www.smartgardening.com) and click on *Workshops and Schedules*.

### Illicit Discharge

- 500 block of Norumbega Drive.

Street Light Survey. Facilities staff completed a street light survey for all street lights within Monrovia this past week, and a request to replace 102 street lights as soon as possible has been submitted to Southern California Edison (SCE).

### **STREETS:**

#### Traffic Signs:

- Install street name signs at Starlit Lane

#### Miscellaneous:

- Magnolia at Maple, Walnut, and Chestnut: Grind concrete at bottom of handicap ramps. Patch potholes in crosswalk areas. Removed and patched section of raised sidewalk.
- Grading operations for new asphalt parking lot at 600 S. Mountain Ave.
- Remove weeds from sidewalk and roadway areas in the 100 east block of Foothill Blvd.
- Clean sidewalk area underneath the freeway overpass on Chestnut Ave.
- Paint handicap stall and access way at Monrovia High School from parking lot to the new concession and restroom facility.

### **UTILITIES:**

#### Customer Service

- 2,471 water meters were read and recorded
- 88 work orders were completed
- 170 water shut-off notices were distributed
- 27 backflow notices were sent out
- 18 water services were reactivated

#### Water Production

- Water consumption is 57.6 millions gallons, an increase of approximately 12% compared to last week's water usage.

#### Department of Health Services Required Water Samples:

- 31 water system samplings
- 15 well samplings
- 5 water treatment facility samplings

Staff attended a water conservation seminar in connection with the implementation of a new water conservation plan and audit system. Staff also attended water crisis and emergency risk communication workshop conducted by the California Department of Health Services.

#### Utility Maintenance

- 2-1" water services were installed
- 95 water main system valves were inspected and operated
- 23 underground service alert's utility location requests were completed
- 1 fire hydrant was replaced
- 1 sewer lateral was replaced at 715 N. Alta Vista Drive

Utility maintenance personnel continue to assist in the construction of the parking lot for the new Corporate Yard on Mountain Avenue.

Have a great weekend!

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**FOR YOUR CALENDARS:**

<b>Tues., Oct. 16, 7:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Regular Council Meeting</b>
<b>Thurs., Oct. 18, 4 – 8 p.m.</b>	<b>2007 Business Showcase; Doubletree Hotel, 924 W. Huntington</b>
<b>Sat. Oct. 27, 8 -3 p.m.</b>	<b>“Make a Difference Day”</b>
<b>Sat. Oct. 27, 2 to 7 p.m.</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Annual “Girl Power” Conference, Community Center</b>
<b>Mon. Nov. 5, TBA</b>	<b>All Commission Dinner, TBA</b>
<b>Tues., Nov. 6, 6:00 p.m.</b>	<b>City Council Study Session</b>
<b>Tues., Nov. 6, 7:30 p.m.</b>	<b>City Council Meeting</b>
<b>Tues., Nov. 20, 7:30 p.m.</b>	<b>City Council Meeting</b>
<b>Thurs., Dec. 6, 6:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Tree Lighting Ceremony, Library Park</b>
<b>Thurs., Dec. 6, 7:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Holiday Parade; Myrtle Avenue</b>

## **CMO ATTACHMENTS:**

### **Gold Line extension possible**

**L.A. mayor endorses preliminary study**

By Fred Ortega, Staff Writer

San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Commuters might soon be able to use a train to catch a plane, if a study endorsed by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa leads to funds to pay for an extension of the Metro Gold Line.

Current plans call for extending the line from Pasadena to Montclair.

The study, which is funded with \$500,000 from the Southern California Association of Governments and the San Bernardino Associated Governments, will examine extending the end of the line from Montclair to the L.A./Ontario International Airport.

It will take 12 to 16 months and include community and government representatives from Ontario, Upland and Rancho Cucamonga, said Metro Foothill Gold Line Construction Authority spokeswoman Susan Hodor. The study will also involve public meetings to determine possible routes the light rail line would take to the airport.

Providing rail service to the Ontario Airport would accomplish Villaraigosa's goal of regionalizing airport services and relieving congestion around LAX, said the mayor's spokesman, Darryl Ryan.

"We want to make sure residents of Los Angeles and all over the country have transportation alternatives," said Ryan. "Extending the Gold Line to Montclair is important in that aspect."

Villaraigosa's support for the Gold Line extension is a departure from the mayor's past focus on transportation projects centered in Los Angeles, including the proposed "Subway to the Sea," said local officials.

"I see it as a definite warming up to the Gold Line and the benefits it will provide," said Duarte Councilman John Fasana, a member of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board.

Support for the project from Villaraigosa gives the project some leverage, said Habib Balian, CEO of the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority.

"What MTA Board members are beginning to understand is that this is the only project ready to go in the county," said Balian, noting that the Gold Line extension's environmental studies have been completed and that the authority already owns the right-of-way for the project. "We can virtually be under construction a year from now."

But Villaraigosa's public support has to be followed up by tangible results - like MTA approval of \$8 million a year to cover the line's operating expenses - in order to give the project a chance to become reality, said Fasana.

"That is a necessary step in order for (Gold Line officials) to pursue federal funding," said Fasana.

A decision about including that funding in the MTA's long-range plan should be reached by next spring, said Fasana.

Metro Gold Line officials plan on requesting hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds next year to kick off the first stage of the more than \$1 billion project. If that money comes through, construction could begin next year and be completed by 2014.

Despite its distance from Los Angeles, the Gold Line extension could have major benefits for the city, said Michael Cano, transportation deputy for L.A. County Supervisor Michael Antonovich.

"This could be a de facto traffic relief program around LAX and the Westside by expanding transit to Ontario Airport," Cano said. "There is definitely a relationship there, and it seems the city of Los Angeles is beginning to realize that."

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