

Your column here

Terry O'Day

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Allow me to introduce myself

AS READERS OF YOUR PAGES KNOW, AN

excellent slate of applicants to fill the city's vacant council seat was presented to the City Council last month. I am humbled to have been chosen by our council from among these applicants. The process for filling our late Mayor Ken Genser's seat drew some attention and along the way I spoke to many people in our community. Until now however, the reporting on the topic, has not provided a good opportunity to tell your readers what core values I bring to my new role, what experience prepares me, or my reflections on the process and our civic life.

I have lived in Santa Monica for 12 years, always in the Pico Neighborhood. I am raising two daughters (5 and 3 years old) with my wife, Tiffany. We both have business degrees that we are applying to careers in service; for me in environmental activism, for Tiffany in treatment for autistic children. As anyone who has raised a family while working full-time knows, we have our hands full.

However, public service is a deeply held value for me and it has drawn me to serve in our city. In college, I began organizing with homeless people, which evolved into advocacy for affordable housing. When I moved to Santa Monica, I found my passion for environmental protection and combined that with my commitment to social justice. Recently, this work led to co-founding Move LA, which organized Measure R — the \$40 billion investment in transit in L.A. County that promises to transform our region. The transit advocacy we are doing through Move LA addresses the environment, social justice, economic development, and neighborhoods. It has been a fortunate place for me to express my values through my work.

My service on the Planning Commission is another way I have expressed my values and gained experience to serve our city. In more than six years as a planning commissioner and commission chair, I participated in the deep outreach that led to the values represented in the Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) framework. Primary among these values is neighborhood protection. Over the years, my commissioners and I also made environmental sustainability a priority, required pedestrian-friendly design, protected neighborhood markets, encouraged outdoor dining, permitted affordable housing, recommended a noise ordinance to council, contributed to the design of the light rail, and recommended zoning changes that reduced development scale in our neighborhoods.

In 2008, my service on the Planning Commission led me to join some of our civic leaders, including Mayor Genser, to defeat Measure T, a poorly drafted control on land use that voters rejected by over 55 percent. Although reasonable people disagreed on the policy (Councilmember Bobby Shriver, for example, favored Measure T), campaign proponents used rhetoric that was unnecessarily vitriolic to demonize opponents of the measure. Such rhetoric is partly what doomed Measure T.

The night of my appointment, many people turned out to speak on the topic. Some spoke in favor of one or another applicant, but some spoke directly against me. Those who spoke against me used rhetoric reminiscent of the pro-Measure T campaign. It was insulting, inaccurate, and accusatory. Since I don't personally know them, they must have formed judgments of me based on hearsay. It was an example of the worst in our city's political discourse. Our voters have rejected it time and again.

Now more than ever we need to summon our city's best. Our youth are still facing violence as a fact of life in the Pico Neighborhood; the recession has deeply hurt many — especially our neighbors who were only barely getting by; our warming planet is threatening our necessary resources; our city's budget is in deficit; our schools are laying off teachers, increasing class sizes and making do without. What's more, little of this matters if we do not have a safe community in which to live, so our public safety professionals need our full support. This year's tragedies in Haiti and Chile are a chilling reminder of the value our service professionals provide. These are the reasons why public service matters — in all its forms — and why I am willing to do my part even when venomous language attempts to distract us.

My hope is that as a council member I can be a bridge-builder between the diverse interests in our city. When I ran independently for council in 2006, this was my goal. The only people who will ever pull my strings are the voters.

I accept this office with big shoes to fill. Mayor Genser was a true statesman, and his example should guide us. I invite readers to reach me at 310-458-8201 or Terry.O'Day@smgov.net to discuss how we can contribute to improving our future — together.

TERRY O'DAY is a Santa Monica City Councilman and executive director of Environment Now, a nonprofit founded in Santa Monica and dedicated to restoring and preserving California's ecosystems.