

## **STUDY OF OXNARD CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS' GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Cities and Joint Powers Committee of the 1997/1998 Ventura County Grand Jury surveyed City Council (Council) members' residences in each of the five largest cities to determine whether there is balanced representation for all parts of each city.

### **INQUIRY**

We sent letters to each of the five cities requesting addresses of City Council members. The location of each member's residence was plotted on a city map.

After plotting the information, we looked at the five largest cities in the county to determine whether the council member's residences were geographically representative of the overall population.

We then decided to determine if the City of Oxnard had a program in place to allow the residents of the city to express their concerns to the Council. This information was sought because the city's population was the largest in the county, approximately 152,820 residents, its geographical boundaries (city limits) 24.705 square miles and its sphere of influence 29.867 square miles.

### **FINDINGS**

The council members' residences in relation to the general population were evenly distributed throughout most of the cities in the county. The only exceptions were the Cities of Oxnard and Camarillo. The council members in Oxnard were mostly from the northwest corner of the city. Camarillo had a grouping of council members living in the center of the city, but the concentration was not as pronounced as Oxnard.

We found that the City Council of Oxnard informally established a Neighborhood Council (NC) Program in 1973. Also, the Council by Resolution 6551 formally established the Inter-Neighborhood Council Committee (INCC) in August 1975.

In December, 1978 the Council through Resolution 7523 adopted the Purposes, Procedures and Bylaws of the INCC program.

The primary purpose of the INCC has been to provide a forum for information exchange among 42 NCs established throughout the city. These NCs represent the local neighborhoods usually set by tract boundaries.

The NC members elect a board of directors who comprise the INCC to act as an advisory committee to the Council. The INCC in this capacity has throughout the years addressed important city issues such as the establishment of Oxnard College, refuse collection programs, enhanced code enforcement and recycling programs.

In 1995 newly elected leadership proposed a more aggressive and politically active approach. Approximately 12 NCs opposed this new direction and established their own informal Focus Group.

In discussions with individual members of NCs, there were differing opinions as to whether the INCC or Focus Group truly represent the views of the general population of the City. As an officially recognized organization, the INCC expects to receive more attention from the Council on matters affecting the residents. Some are of the opinion that the Focus Group sometimes has more influence with the Council than the INCC.

There are some citizens in areas of the city who are unaware of or have expressed little interest in the NC and INCC structure.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Some Oxnard citizens believe they are inadequately represented by the City Council.

There are neighborhoods which have little or no representation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The leadership of the NCs and INCC should make every effort to unify their membership, including the Focus Group, in order to strengthen their representation.
- The NCs and INCC should study ways and means to more effectively increase residents' interaction with the Council which could include development of recommendations for expansion of the Council or establishment of councilmanic districts to geographically and fairly represent the growing population.

## **RESPONSE REQUIRED**

Oxnard City Council

Oxnard INCC Board of Directors