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VENTURA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

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GARY L. GILLIG
City Attorney

OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDING JUDGE

September 30, 1998

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Honorable Charles Campbell
Presiding Judge
Ventura County Superior Court
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Dear Judge Campbell:

On behalf of the City Council of the City of Oxnard ("Oxnard"), I am responding to the 1998 Ventura County Grand Jury report entitled, "Study of City Council Members Geographical Representation". This report inquired into the location of the residences of the elected officials in each of the five largest cities in Ventura County. The purpose was to determine whether there is balanced representation of all geographic areas in each of the five cities. The City Council appreciates the comments of the Grand Jury and understands the limitations and constraints under which the Grand Jury prepared its report and welcomes the opportunity to respond to it.

The 95th anniversary of the incorporation of Oxnard occurred this June 1998. The City Council is justifiably proud of what Oxnard and its residents have accomplished in that period. These accomplishments are the result of effective, responsive leadership by members of the City Council regardless of the location of a councilmember's residence.

The present City Council is especially representative for several reasons. Four members were born in Oxnard and a fifth member arrived in the city as a young man and was educated in Oxnard schools. The councilmembers each have over forty years living and working in the community. During this time, these councilmembers have acquired specialized knowledge and understanding of each and every geographic segment of Oxnard and each and every resident group in the city.

Oxnard is a culturally rich and diverse city. The councilmembers reflect that racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. The four other large cities in Ventura County cannot make that statement.

One councilmember is a direct descendent of one of the founding families of the city. Three are children of families who were in Ventura County before or very early during the course of incorporation of Oxnard.

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The current councilmembers have served Oxnard in elected office collectively for over 36 years. They have been elected a total of ten times for four year terms and three times for two year terms as Mayor. Present and prior City Councils have pioneered many of the innovations in local government in Ventura County that are responsive to constituents and which many people now take for granted.

Oxnard was the first city in Ventura County to have a neighborhood council program, police storefronts, neighborhood watches and cleanups, and graffiti eradication. Further, all Planning Commission and City Council meetings, retreats, and Mobilehome Park Rent Review Board meetings have been televised for over twenty years.

To ensure broad public participation on important municipal issues, prior city councils created an Oxnard Advisory Committee comprised of 45 members, and a 2020 General Plan Advisory Committee of 45 members. All members of City Council have listed telephone numbers for home and offices and are readily accessible to residents. This City Council has adopted rules governing its meetings to provide for multiple opportunities for public comments at the beginning of meetings and before information consent items, reports, study sessions and during public hearings. The city also has a web page.

The councilmembers have grown up, attended school, worked, and attended church in Oxnard. They belong to numerous service clubs, and have extended families in the city. Therefore, the councilmembers have many avenues to understand and to respond to the concerns, issues and problems of Oxnard residents. These factors are much more important elements of responsive representation than a councilmember simply residing in a particular area of the city.

In 1996, the City Council formed a Charter Commission to study changing from a general law city to a charter city and to have councilmember elections by district. The commission discussed this issue, and concluded that the neighborhood council program serves Oxnard residents well as a vehicle to expand public participation and involvement in local issues and that election by district was not necessary to achieve effective representation.

The problem alluded to in the Grand Jury report is with the current Inter Neighborhood Council Committee (INCC). The INCC by-laws are under review and will be considered by the City Council for revision this year. The City Council is confident that amended by-laws in addition to customary changes in the makeup of the INCC will correct a temporary situation.

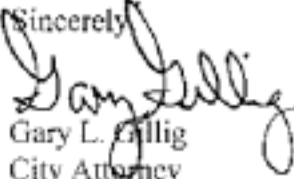
The strength of the neighborhood council program has always derived from the individual neighborhood councils and their leadership. Currently, there are 43 active neighborhood councils and many are performing well and greatly assist to make Oxnard a better community. Individual councilmembers and staff frequently attend meetings as speakers and to respond to concerns and

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questions when requested. The program is staffed by city employees.

Again, the City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury report. The City Council acknowledges the time the Grand Jury took to prepare its report and the spirit in which the Grand Jury labored.

In sum, the City Council has concluded that balanced, responsive representation for all parts of Oxnard is attained by election of councilmembers at large. Many cities, larger and smaller than Oxnard have similar systems. The City Council has studied both methods and opted for the present system. Nothing, however, is static. The City Council is always open to further review and study of this subject.

Sincerely

Gary L. Gullig
City Attorney

cc: Dr. Manuel M. Lopez, Mayor
Mayor Pro Tem Bedford Pinkard
Councilmember Thomas E. Holden
Councilmember Dean Maulhardt
Councilmember John C. Zaragoza
Edmund F. Sotelo, City Manager