

Cronyism, Alive and Well in Sierra Madre

By Glenn Lambdin

Back in 1997, I applied for a position as a planning commissioner. At that time, there were several politically charged issues facing the city and I found myself in the middle of some of them. Each applicant that applied for the position was publicly interviewed by the City Council to discuss their experience and qualifications. To make a long story boring, I didn't get the position. The council selected Gurdon Miller because, frankly, he was a more qualified choice. He had the educational and professional experience that placed him a cut above the other applicants. Considering the make up of the council at that time, I believe I could argue that I would've had more political favor with a majority of the council. Regardless and rightfully so, the council selected Gurdon because it was in the best interest of the city to select the most qualified candidate. Plain and simple, Gurdon was the right choice. That council had the integrity to do what was right instead of making a selection based on political cronyism.

Logic and reason would dictate that a healthy council would only desire to select the most qualified candidate; a candidate whose qualifications most closely match the requirements of the job description. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case last week when Councilmembers Watts, Zimmerman, and Macgillivray voted to appoint Kevin Paschall to the position of planning commissioner without even discussing a single candidate's qualifications and experience.

For just a moment, consider the fact that since Councilmembers Watts and Zimmerman came into office the City has been facing an unprecedented number of law suits relating to land use issues. Hundreds of thousands of the resident's hard-earned tax dollars are being spent on legal fees to defend the policies of Watts and Zimmerman. With those facts in mind, wouldn't it be prudent to assume that the experience and qualifications of planning commission applicants would be of paramount concern to a responsible City Councilmember? ...apparently not. According to the actions of Watts, Zimmerman, and Macgillivray, qualifications and experience don't matter. Interviewing all the applicants, or even a single one for that matter, or discussing qualifications is not necessary. And, according to Mayor Zimmerman's absurd theatrical admission at "10 PM on a Tuesday night," his choice was in fact nothing more than a political appointment.

Doesn't it seem logical that the council would want to ask basic minimal questions of applicants such as: Do you have an educational background or any experience in planning, zoning and land use issues? Do you have any experience with CEQA as it applies to issues relating to the duties of a planning commissioner? Do you know what a Neg. Dec. is or a Mitigated Neg. Dec? Are you able to read and comprehend a set of working blueprints? Have you ever read the City's zoning codes?... Doesn't it seem logical that applicants should be interviewed and their qualifications discussed by the council. Isn't that what decent and functional city government is all about?

I wonder if Watts, Zimmerman, and Macgillivray are even aware of how insulting their behavior was to all of the other applicants who sincerely applied for the position with a desire to serve the City in such an important volunteer capacity. I wonder if they even care.

I hope that Mr. Paschall will be an adequate commissioner. Actually, I hope he will be a great commissioner, the greatest the City has ever seen. Perhaps he was the most qualified of all the applicants, but the fact is, we'll never know because the Watts-Zimmerman-Macgillivray triad decided that they are above any legitimate selection process. They showed the public that they can't concern themselves with an applicant's qualifications and experience because political cronyism is more important to them than a logical selection process utilizing critical thought.

Remember the old joke about the hillbilly that goes something like, "Last month I couldn't even spell technician, and now I is one." Commissioner Paschall, I read your application and may I suggest that you re-read your application as well and learn how to spell "planning commissioner" because now you is one!

For some reason, this one is just not passing the straight-face test.