

## STUNews Public Letters on City Manager Recruitment

### The process of finding a new city manager

Dear City Council,

I am writing you today about the process of finding a new manager for our city. I think it is in everyone's best interest that residents have a say about this important process. We need time for our voices to be both listened to and heard.

I cannot support an automatic internal appointment. I can support an open recruitment process. Here is one reason of many from my vantage point and from my experience.

My background? My grandparents built and operated the Coast Inn (1929-1978).

My dad, Dick Smith, was one of three *first* Laguna city police officers (1931-1939).

My mom's family came to Laguna in 1917, with my aunt Laguna's first lady lifeguard.

My dad built our home on TOW in 1949; he is the reason for the trail to the fire road, with my help.

My personal background? I received my Masters, M.Ed. I had a private practice counseling in downtown Del Mar. My last client was up for admiral in the Navy. It was his job to go out to a ship after accidents like a plane crash and discover what the interpersonal problems were that led up to the accident. I was also personal friends with the longtime and effective mayor, Tom Pierson, of Del Mar. I understand our new city manager may be promoted from within. After years of my family contributing to their hometown, I want to contribute here now by sharing my experience and why I suggest the need to interview other candidates. Besides the many skill sets required, the interpersonal skills are so paramount for our city, I think. In February 2019, I received a letter for a meeting of neighbors on TOW affected by the completion of the new bike trail over to the fire road. I anticipated the gathering was to formulate a plan to help offset the increase in traffic with a knowing traffic would grow. The city set aside \$30,000 for any negative ramifications. A new-to-me person ran the meeting, which to see someone new is not unusual. This meeting quickly turned to the use of funds elsewhere. But those of us who wanted could meet with this person on a Sunday morning, which I volunteered my driveway directly across from the trail. I figured I would be heard with an easy show and tell of the property. Nope. Then a month later, someone complained about a tree next to the trail; it was at this juncture I learned that the person leading the meeting was our new assistant manager. I never figured her for this higher position because of her inability to listen, her neglect in knowing the history of this trail, and just how she conducted herself, in my view, in a more aggressive, blunt manner, etc. Still, I prevailed. I even went so far as to pay Greg Vail, leader of my dad's parcel during the trail being built for five years to write my plea to the city manager. But, again, the assistant

management was adamant to give use of the funds elsewhere with no regard to what I call common sense. Now neighbors, private property, and visitors will forever more continue to be impacted by the increase in traffic. In time, the need for city help as a result will increase. So my main concern is for the city to look for a qualified candidate who possesses the skills Laguna needs, especially the skill to listen and appropriately designate.

Thank you for your time to consider,  
Carolyn Burris  
Laguna Beach

# # #

### **A letter to our City Council regarding City Manager hiring process**

Dear Mayor Whalen and City Council Members:

Happy New Year. As the council moves forward in appointing a new city manager this year, I ask that a professional recruitment firm be hired to conduct an open and extensive recruitment to fill this important leadership position. Based upon city records, in 2010, Murray & Associates was hired to handle the recruitment process when CM John Pietig was appointed. In 2012, this same firm contributed to the recruitment guideline document at the link here:

<https://icma.org/documents/recruitment-guidelines>.

As a longtime resident, I am not convinced that we currently have an internal successor pool to fill this position that would be supported by the majority of residents. We have the opportunity to find a city manager with the type of leadership, interpersonal skills, and personality that city employees, residents, and businesses desire and deserve. In fact, I would like to suggest that the council ask for some public input on the important attributes of a new city manager to use in their decision making and conduct an outsourced confidential city employee satisfaction survey to identify internal cultural issues that might exist that could provide valuable insight to the incoming administrator. Here's an example of an employee survey that I found quite impressive:

[www.cityofpensacola.com/CivicSend/ViewMessage/Message/122077](http://www.cityofpensacola.com/CivicSend/ViewMessage/Message/122077). I have personally participated in government employee surveys of this type and the results often surprise city leaders.

Also, below is an article titled "It Starts With Civility: Elected Officials' Role in attracting and Retaining Employees" that speaks to government recruitments, civility, and leadership within council chambers. I believe this information critical to achieving positive engagement between public officials and constituents for a healthy and harmonious community. Since 2018, we have documentation that clearly reflects our city having respect and civility issues that has consumed our civic environment and continues to divide us. Much time and money has been

lost due to a high level of discourse between certain council members and the public. This is a good article written by two California city managers who understand the intricacies involved in government recruitment and retention and the importance of finding a strong administrator who listens and can implement and execute ideas with the support of council members and the public: <https://www.westerncity.com/article/it-starts-civility-elected-officials-role-attracting-and-retaining-employees>.

Thank you for your time and consideration. You all have a big responsibility to the community, and I trust that you will take the utmost care in finding the right city manager to unite and move us forward. Thank you for all that you do for Laguna.

Respectfully,  
MJ Abraham

Founder, LagunaBeachCHAT

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### **Nationwide search necessary for a City Manager**

Assistant City Manager Dupuis is lobbying strongly to be appointed our next City Manager. This would be a grave error in my opinion and would not serve Laguna Beach residents well. On top of her light experience outside of transportation, I have heard of unhappiness with her management style. A confidential employee satisfaction survey from a third party is vital to gauge the current culture at City Hall, identify issues, and assist the next CM on areas upon which to improve. Obviously, these findings should be reported *directly* to City Council in an open meeting. Additionally, Dupuis is not a person who is mindful of the budget in my opinion (Bluebird slide comes instantly to mind), seemingly farms everything out to consultants, and sometimes comes unprepared to CC meetings – prime example was the rebuilding of Main Beach and she could not answer questions. She said she would come back with answers at the next meeting and she didn't. My biggest concern with the selection of the next City Manager is that there has been an assumption that the current ACM is the most qualified for this job. It was stated when Dupuis received her \$25K raise that she was in consideration to become the next City Manager, so I believe there has been a bias from the start. I don't think that narrow focus is good for Laguna Beach. We are a world-class destination with myriad complex issues. I think that a national search will yield someone of top quality and deep experience to guide us into the next decades. I would suggest that a Master's degree, at least five years supervisory experience at a similar level, and a strong background in finance is needed. The city should easily be able to find qualified candidates at the City Manager level rather than at the Assistant City Manager level. We offer top pay, excellent benefits and

pension, with every other Friday off, and we are Laguna Beach. I would think that qualified candidates will be responding in droves for this job.

We deserve to have the very best that's out there and, in my opinion, to select Dupuis with primarily transportation experience when we have so many other issues (sewer, downtown, tourists) would be a grave disservice to the residents of Laguna Beach. We have selected outside the city for the Police Chief, Community Development Director, and Fire Chief. Why wouldn't we do the same for the most important city position, City Manager? Former CM Frank seemingly hand-picked CM Pietig. CM Pietig seems to be doing the same with Dupuis. Haven't we had enough of this regime? It's time for some new blood and new ideas.

Michèle Monda  
Laguna Beach