

NEWS

Teens take over the City Council *Local high school students hold 'mock' Council meeting to learn more about City Hall*

By Bryan M. Gold - Citizen Staff Writer

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More than 20 high school students from across the Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) got a taste of Elk Grove City Hall this summer.

They held a mock City Council meeting on July 31 where they addressed an old headache that plagues students and neighbors of Franklin High School and Toby Johnson Middle School: traffic.

Their solution? Open an existing road between the campuses for parents who pick up or drop off their children.

Other options included bringing back the school district's bus service, removing a pedestrian bridge, and adding fencing to keep students from walking across a local creek, and further staggering the start times for the two schools.

"It is a big problem because it has been going on for a long time," Franklin High student Ashlyn Wiseman said after pounding the gavel to adjourn the meeting. "So discussing the issue of opening the road between Franklin and Toby, it doesn't look like a hazard with the students, but it is a big issue that I hope will get solved."

She was a part of Summer at City Hall, a joint effort between the school district and the city of Elk Grove to teach students about local government and be introduced to public service careers.

The school district hosted the students the first week with the students gathering at City Hall for the second and final week of the program. The mock Council meeting ended the two-week session.

Students shadowed several city employees, which included meetings discussing the issue. Wiseman said she appreciated getting a different perspective on the matter.

"Just being in the car and seeing all of this traffic, you don't really think about it," she said. "But coming here and discussing it, looking at the problems, and finding there are solutions, it really changed my perspective."

She added, "I hope that our recommendation is taken seriously so the issue could get resolved."

The other main benefit for Wiseman was that sitting in the mayor's seat and running the meeting helped her with public speaking.

"I'm the type to sit in the back, the quiet one in the corner," she said. "So to be put on the spot like that helped me overcome my fear."

She added, "This helped me gain more confidence. I learned a lot of new skills here that I don't think I would have learned anywhere else."

All students had speaking roles at the Council meeting. Council members in their comments mentioned the recently held Strauss Festival of Elk Grove and the annual Multicultural Festival on Aug. 22.

Department heads mentioned items of interest such as City Attorney Laurel Aitken noting Elk Grove's lawsuit

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Photos courtesy of EGUSD - "City Attorney" Laurel Aitken and "City Manager" See Moua listened to a presentation during a mock City Council meeting on July 31.

against proposed aquatics center developer P3 International.

Police Chief Richard Tong mentioned National Night Out on Aug. 4 and Leonardo Padilla recapped the group's visit to the city's Special Waste Collection Center in the southern part of Elk Grove.

Speakers during the two weeks included all five actual Council members, city staff, EGUSD Superintendent Christopher Hoffman, Cosumnes Community Services District General Manager Jeff Ramos, and Cosumnes Fire Department Chief Tracey Hansen as well as Rep. Ami Bera (D-Elk Grove).

Florin High School Law Academy teachers Carlos Garcia and Benny Rich coordinated the summer session. Rich said many speakers were scheduled to speak for 15 minutes but ended up talking with the students for more than an hour since students kept asking questions.

Elk Grove resident Martin Gonzalez directs the Institute for Local Government, which is the research and education firm.

He and Bina Lefkovitz, the founder of Summer at City Hall in Sacramento, attended the mock Council meeting and are considering how they could take the entire Summer at City Hall concept statewide.

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