



4305 Santa Fe Avenue, Vernon, California 90058
Telephone (323) 583-8811

November 15, 2010

The Honorable Gloria Molina
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 W. Temple St
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisor Molina:

I am writing you in my capacity as Vernon's City Administrator, a post I have held since this past July. I have been with the City for 22 years – all of it with the Fire Department – and I still serve as Vernon's Fire Chief, receiving an annual salary of \$210,647.40. As the Board considers your motion proposing a Constitutional Amendment regarding housing policies in the City of Vernon – and for every other charter city in California – I wanted to provide some information about the City which may be pertinent to your discussion.

Vernon holds a unique and important role as a job creator in the region. About 50,000 people work every day in the City of Vernon. They are employed by 1800 businesses. The City generates \$300 million in tax revenues for the State and local governments. Our success at supporting our businesses results in a total regional economic impact of over \$5 billion a year to the region. A 2007 Kosmont study ranked Vernon the top City of the thirteen industrial cities it evaluated, with Vernon coming in above local cities including Carson, Industry, Los Angeles and Commerce.

The City is proud of the fact that it was named one of the best places in the region to do business by the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). Most of the 50,000 people who work in Vernon live in the surrounding communities and are your constituents. In fact, Vernon is an important source of employment for several of the nearby communities. The LAEDC estimated that more than 13% of the workers who live in Maywood and Huntington Park have jobs in Vernon. And Vernon's widely-dispersed workforce creates a crucial economic driver for the cities in which Vernon employees live.

Our city has received intense scrutiny of late, and some for good reason. We accept that criticism and had been working hard to resolve many of these issues long before they became the focus of scrutiny.

Exclusively Industrial

Over the past decade, three former City officials have been charged with crimes, although only one has been convicted. The City has worked proactively to address concerns that surfaced with respect to the former officials who were charged. In the case of the one elected official who eventually was convicted of a crime (of not living in the City while holding office), the City took the extraordinary step last year of suing him even as he held office. Similarly, the City recently placed its prior City Administrator on administrative leave pending the City's review of potentially prohibited transactions involving a family member. The City took that action before the individual was charged. Today, none of the former officials have any affiliation with the City of Vernon.

Many other cities have endured troubling incidents (e.g. South Gate) without the kind of affirmative response taken recently by the City of Vernon and yet the County has never attempted to disincorporate them or to mandate their housing polices.

The City of Vernon has retooled and modernized our city attorney function, and we have eliminated the provisions in all employment contracts that led to the compensation levels that have been the subject of much discussion. Our salaries are posted on the City's website.

To be sure, Vernon's unique mission to support our residents and businesses sets it apart from other cities. Our city structure and staff reflect our mission. The City supports a Class 1 Fire Department, one of only 60 in the *country*. The Vernon Fire Department has one of the best Hazardous Waste units in the state and routinely provides aid to other jurisdictions, including Los Angeles County, to protect communities and train other departments. The Fire Department provides aid to surrounding cities and the County in virtually every emergency.

The City also has a top notch Police Department that works closely with the Sherriff's Department on a number of major initiatives in the region. The City also has its own Health Department assisting businesses in the City with environmental compliance issues. And all the while, we are a financially conservative city that balances its books and continues to provide high quality services—not only to our City but to surrounding areas.

Businesses thrive because Vernon offers some of the lowest utility rates in California for electricity, natural gas, water and fiber optics. And we offer outstanding services and results, including an emergency response time of three minutes, low fees, and a streamlined and efficient community services department.

Vernon is a high functioning city with unique characteristics – many of them positive – and a set of challenges that need to be overcome. We are currently evaluating City roles and responsibilities, as well as compensation, and continue to look for new ways to provide more efficient and cost-effective services to Vernon businesses. Our city is also in the process of reviewing and making changes to many of its current policies, including working on a long-term housing policy, and we hope that you will allow Vernon's elected officials and city staff to continue this process without undue interference.

As you consider Supervisor Molina's motion, and Supervisor Antonovich's suggestion that Vernon somehow be annexed to the City of Commerce, please consider the benefits that the City

of Vernon consistently delivers to the County. Although the City of Commerce is a fine City, we have no interest in being part of the City of Commerce and there is no good policy or legal reason for the County to embark on an unprecedented attempt to interfere with the operations of a local City.

Our city generates over \$300 million in tax revenues each year. The City has new commercial industrial construction underway, something not happening in most other areas. The City and the businesses located in the City are providing jobs to hard working members of your communities. Our city government is proud of the tremendous benefits the City brings to its residents, businesses and surrounding community. We are also mindful of the issues that have brought the City negative scrutiny and we take seriously our responsibility to address those issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark C. Whitworth/KE". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mark C. Whitworth
City Administrator