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Council Member

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Newport Beach, California

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THE NEW YEAR

If you have ideas of what should be a priority for 2014, mark down January 25 on your calendar. That is the day scheduled for the council's annual goal setting. While I have no lofty new goals at this point (too many old goals unachieved), I do have the beginnings of a list: Getting the runoff off Little Corona; opening Lower Castaways for recreational use; a completed bicycle master plan and CdM parking plan; some art for the council chambers and community room. These all seem manageable, but I'm sure that I shall learn otherwise as the year progresses.

PIRATE PADDLING

With the growing popularity of stand-up paddling, last summer saw a spate of bootleg operations--people pulling up with a vanload of boards, laying them out on the beach and setting up a rental operation. Great for the operator--pure profit. Not so great for local businesses who pay rent, taxes, business license fees--and then have to compete with someone who's doing none of that. Also not great for people wanting to use the public beach only to find it's been taken over by a business. The city will be cracking down on these pirate operations this summer which should provide an even playing field for businesses and more sand for beachgoers.

VOLTAIRE AND THE GENERAL PLAN

As word got out that amendments to the General Plan were being considered, a number of entities came forward with requests for their particular amendments, none of which, you understand, would cause the slightest bother to anyone in the city. Whether it was a new hotel, transformation of office space to residential, a shift of development rights from one area to another, all would make for the best of all possible worlds. Fortunately, the committee doing the initial evaluation does not depend on Dr. Pangloss for guidance. Right now, various experts are preparing the draft EIR which will give the committee real tools to evaluate the impacts of the various requests.

The draft EIR should be out for comment February-March, the Planning Commission will review the recommendations probably in May and the Council in June. The Council-approved changes to the General Plan will go to the voters in November.

NATURE RESERVE OF ORANGE COUNTY

I suspect there are many people unaware of NROC. This non-profit was established in 1996 to manage 38,000 acres of habitat and wildlife preserve, none of which it owns. Rather, it coordinates the activities of land owners and land managers, funds research and manages various projects in areas as diverse as Whiting Regional Park and the Upper Newport Bay Ecological Reserve. Guiding this is a board made up of representatives of the US and California Fish and Wildlife Agencies, OC Fire Authority, UCI, The Irvine Company, Irvine Ranch Water District, Edison, Transportation Corridor Agency and the cities of Irvine and Newport as well as three public members. With this broad representation, it wouldn't be surprising if there were a certain complacency at NROC, a feeling of all bases covered, but that is not the case. The organization recently invited a number of outside scientists for a day-long evaluation of its work. The overall grade was good, but fresh eyes brought fresh insights that will improve an already-successful operation. While this is a good lesson for all of us, I think it would be particularly valuable for state agencies which often have staff who are very competent but who have spent their working lives at the agency which may make that fresh perspective difficult.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

This is a two-way process; please don't hesitate to contact me with your ideas and opinions.

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