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League of California Cities - a brief history lesson

By Vera Kochan

The town council designated Moraga Mayor Roger Wykle as its voting delegate and Vice Mayor Kymberleigh Korpus as an alternate to the League of California Cities annual Long Beach meeting in October. While the town's sitting mayor and vice mayor have typically been delegated throughout the years, it was made unanimously official during the June 26 town council meeting.

The LCC was founded in 1898 with the intent to "advocate for the common interests of California's cities." It all began when the Alameda (population 17,000) town council requested their city clerk, Ben Lamborn, to write a letter to the more than 100 cities in the state inquiring about their experiences with a new mechanical device called a road roller. When Lamborn's query letter took up only the top half of the page, he decided "to make it look better" by adding additional questions such as: Name of city? Population? When incorporated? Officials?

Haven A. Mason, the city clerk of Santa Clara (population 3,200), was a community activist and newspaper publisher who had recently read about the National Municipal League, founded in 1894 by a citizens group tired of corruption in government. Mason saw unique possibilities through Lamborn's letter and rode the Southern Pacific Railroad to meet with Lamborn about taking multi-city cooperation a step further.

Mason and Lamborn saw the advantages of organizing city officials to consolidate experiences with more than just road equipment. Their vision was to create a veritable how-to manual of suggestions regarding things like record keeping, tax assessing, coping with the recent phenomenon of electricity and other new scientific inventions.

Santa Clara's mayor, Delos Druffel, liked the idea and sent letters to all of the other California mayors. When the question of where the meetings could be held arose, San Francisco's wealthy mayor, James D. Phelan, advanced \$3,000 of his own money, if the meetings were to take place in his city. Phelan's plans to run for the U.S. Senate helped to open his wallet toward the new venture.

Enthusiastic replies from almost half the cities in the state brought the first League of California Municipalities to a meeting at Pioneer Hall on Fourth Street in San Francisco, on Dec. 14, 1898. Phelan's opening address suggested, "We should come together once each year to formulate our needs and relate our experiences for the benefit of all."

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