

Daily Pilot/LA Times Commentary

By JEAN WATT, SEP 20, 2018



[Photo Credit: Amazon's corporate office building in Sunnyvale. Photo by Lisa Werner / Getty Images]

The question is, Who to vote for in November's City Council election? I know who I'm voting for because actions speak louder than words.

Forums are good introductions, but often don't do much to differentiate one candidate from another. All candidates say they "love" Newport so, once again, we need to examine actions, not words.

There is one type of action I discovered that sums it up for me. Some members of the current City Council are wittingly or unwittingly part of the "growth machine" well ensconced in Orange County. Of course. There is lots of money to be made here through decisions about big, lucrative development. The sky's the limit. There are political futures to be furthered as well.

Here's one case in point. In 2017, then-Mayor Kevin Muldoon wrote a letter on behalf of the City Council and city of Newport Beach, at the behest of the city of Irvine mayor and the Irvine Co., saying that we would all love it if Amazon would locate its second

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headquarters in Irvine — with 50,000 new high-paying jobs along with other associated jobs and families.

This never appeared on our City Council's agenda for the public to see. And what would we have said? We would certainly have wanted to know more about the sheer volume of development, density and traffic that would mean. What would 50,000 or more new families do to the already too-expensive housing market?

As it turns out, Amazon went elsewhere and subsequently we read of the impact of its first headquarters in Seattle, of its loss of "soul" from the building boom primarily by Amazon's impact.

An article in the New York Times by Timothy Egan reads, "I live in the city that hit the Amazon jackpot, now the biggest company town in America. They have 40,000 employees here, who in turn attracted 50,000 other new jobs. They own or lease a fifth of all the class A office space.

"But median home prices have doubled in five years, to \$700,000. This is not a good thing in a place where teachers and cops used to be able to afford a house with a water view."

This article ended with, "To the next Amazon lottery winner I would say, enjoy the boom — but be careful what you wish for."

Seventeen of the 34 city mayors in Orange County wrote such a letter as requested by their growth machine cronies.

Laguna, for one, did not. Laguna has a soul it has steadfastly tried to preserve and, like Laguna, I hope we would choose to keep our charm and character as well.

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As a start, we can elect people who by all indications will choose to put the Newport Beach citizens first.

Three people running for our City Council want to know what we think, and I'm voting for them: Joy Brenner, Tim Stoaks and Roy Engelbrecht.

JEAN WATT is a former Newport Beach city councilwoman and a longtime community activist.