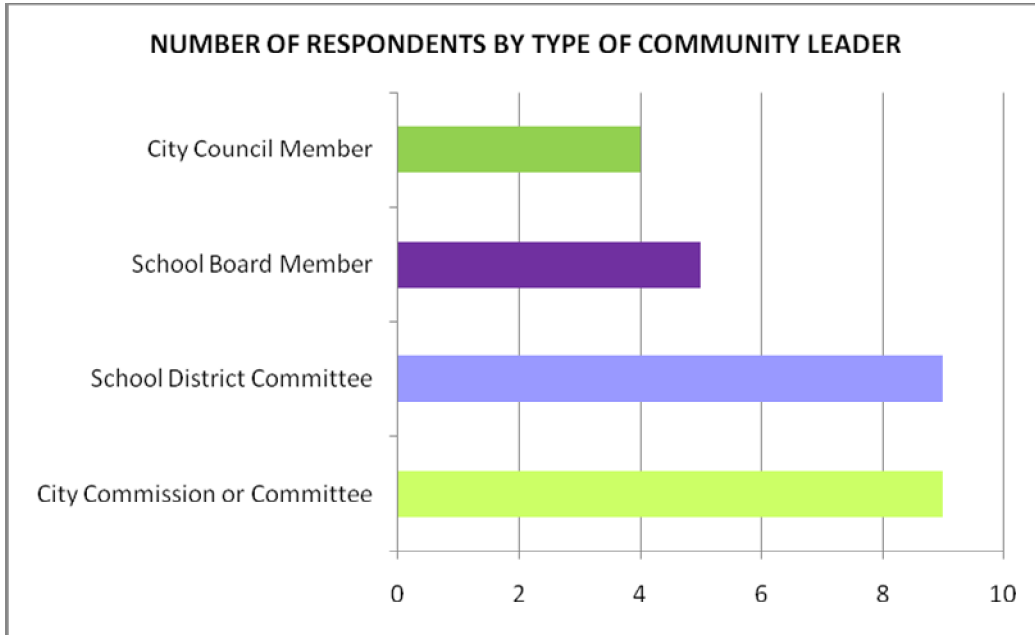


Piedmont League of Women Voters

Panel on “Civic Involvement” - September 8, 2011

Summary of Community Leader Survey Results

1. In what capacity do you serve the Piedmont community? *



* Total number of respondents = 25; Some respondents serve on a City and School District Committee.

2. How much time do you spend per week in your capacity as a community leader?

Type of Community Leader	1 – 10 hrs/wk	10 – 20 hrs/wk	20 + hrs/wk
City Commission or Committee Member	9	-	-
School District Committee Member	8	1	-
School Board Member	-	5	-
City Council Member	1	3	-

3. In your opinion what are the most important qualities necessary for public office or serving on a commission or committee?

City Commission or Committee

- Interest in the function of the committee.
- Most importantly, one must "care" and enjoy helping people, community and the city. Everything else can be learned.
- Willing to serve and listen with an open mind, understand the budget constraints.
- Willingness to put personal opinions/preferences aside for the community's best interest, excellent listening skills, ability to build consensus where possible, willingness to do the detailed homework necessary to understand the issues.
- An interest in the long term interests of Piedmont and a willingness to be open to listening to all views and opinions and to be able to place these values above personal ego or personal agenda.
- A desire and willingness to take the time to understand and decide on what needs to be done and to do a good job with respect to whatever it is that needs to be done. Patience is also needed.
- A genuine interest serving Piedmont and the ability to get along with others.
- Time; interest in the administration of a civic entity; strong belief in the right of the public to participate in government; the ability to listen to both sides, and then make an informed, independent decision; not be beholden to any vested interests; realize that this is not a popularity contest - not everyone will be happy with you all the time.
- Interest in the topic at hand, ability to act in the broadest community interest, experience in related matters.

School District Committee

- Empathy, knowledge of subject matters.
- Willingness to listen, work together, think beyond your immediate concerns.
- Willingness to devote the time necessary to research and provide thoughtful and comprehensive input to the other members and the public.
- An interest in community involvement; a willingness to spend the time required both to stay informed and attend most if not all of the meetings; and, depending upon the nature of the assignment, some specific expertise in the area.
- A willingness to do the preparation for the meetings. Knowledge of Piedmont. A willingness to examine the details of an issue. An ability to put the common good before personal interests. Common sense!
- A desire and willingness to take the time to understand and decide on what needs to be done and to do a good job with respect to whatever it is that needs to be done. Patience is also needed.
- Patience, understanding the context for making a decision, and listening to others, including the public even when you might disagree – you might learn something.
- Interest in the function of the committee.

- Willingness to do the work; ability to analyze, process, and communicate information; willingness to work with others, including those who may not agree with you.

School Board

- The desire to provide a service to your community. On the School Board, the need for having a broad view - children first, but fully inclusive of the public interest and all the employees of the District.
- The qualities vary depending on the position. A willingness to listen, gather the facts, and be willing to make a thoughtful (sometimes difficult) decision are important.
- A public official must be committed to serving the community. There are two parts to this commitment. First, you must devote your time, your attention, and your intellect to understand the issues, evaluate alternatives, and make the best decisions you can with the information you are reasonably able to obtain. Your decisions matter and you must care about the outcomes. Second, you represent the community as a whole. That means you need to listen to the views of as many citizens as you can, and not just those who have the time to attend hearings before you. Your decisions will not often make everyone happy, but you should be able to clearly state why it is best for Piedmont.
- Some of the most important qualities include: 1. Interest in representing and listening to input from all of the key stakeholders in the community 2. Focus on high level strategy and direction, not on individual or narrow issues which may be in the news. 3. Patience for the long term because most changes will be incremental and evolutionary. 4. Self confidence and thick skin for dealing with regular criticism from press or individuals focused on specific issues.
- The ability to work on a team; an openness to hearing many viewpoints; an ability to synthesize what you are hearing and explain your thinking; and the fortitude to make decisions on behalf of the whole community.

City Council

- Willingness to listen to all opinions and being open-minded; patience and not letting emotions get in the way of making informed decisions; being respectful and recognize that individuals have the right to express their opinions even though you may not agree; being able to focus on the important issues; not being tied up with analysis paralysis in making decisions.
- Thick skin and a sense of humor.
- In Piedmont, public service is solely dependent on volunteers and to serve properly, officials need to spend considerable effort learning about the operation of the public agencies. Therefore, the most important quality is a willingness to critically evaluate recommendations from staff. Secondly, officials need to think "collectively" - they are part of a governing or advisory board and that does share a specific goal - they should not attempt to assert their positions over that of others. Thirdly, civility. Officials do not arrive with an "agenda" and should basically respect the collective process they have signed on to.
- The ability to listen to all stakeholders, thoughtfully weigh the facts, and make a decision in the best interests of the community as a whole.

4. What do you know now that you wish you had known before you took office or became a commission or committee member?

City Commission Committee

- How much time is involved in meetings.
- Having had a better understanding of the city structure would have been and would still be important to be an effective member, i.e. who reports to who. And a recent history of past council members and commissioners, since they all go on to other city or community appointments, would also be helpful.
- Who the 'hidden powers' are in Piedmont.
- I would have liked to have had a better understanding of the workings and responsibilities of all of city government. Perhaps an "overview" orientation memo can be prepared and provided to all new commission and committee members that helps them understand where they fit in city government.
- More about Piedmont local politics.
- The city does not do an adequate job helping new committee members understand the scope of their duties. An orientation session would be helpful.
- Staff wields a lot more power than most people think. Council doesn't also listen to Commission's advice - take the Blair Park example and the Planning Commission.
- Nothing.

School District Committee

- The amount of time and knowledge it would take to adequately fulfill the needs of the position.
- It depends on the committee. Knowing the goals, but that is often established in advance, good planning.
- More about the Brown Act.
- More about Piedmont local politics.
- Quite frankly, more about the "politics" and power structure of Piedmont, including the agenda of the bureaucrats. As we have seen in several recent instances, the City Council was woefully inadequate in both "managing" the bureaucrats in the undergrounding situation. In this case, the Council totally abdicated their managerial and policy responsibilities.
- Full extent of time commitments. Extent to which staff can be relied upon to make time to respond to requests for information.
- Nothing. I knew what I was getting into based on past roles within the community and have had no real surprises since starting my present involvement.

School Board

- The amount of time that it takes to properly do the job. You cannot just attend meetings--you must prepare for them, ask questions to gather any additional information you need, and form your own opinions regarding the issues. That alone takes time. Beyond that, you often have the ability to contribute some area of expertise to the City or School District, and that takes more time.

- I hadn't counted on meeting so many wonderful people.
- When the going gets tough, lead with your convictions and work with others to find solutions. You cannot solve the community's problems alone.
- I knew that I knew very little. Late decision. I cannot answer that for myself.
- I was very involved in the schools before running for public office, so I knew what to expect.

City Council

- Time commitment; community issues that can really divide the community or neighbors, but none that would have changed my mind for serving.
- How vicious Piedmont has become when people disagree with you.
- I learned that campaigning in a contested election is exciting and a once in a life time experience, that I thoroughly enjoyed and was good at. It is a rich educational experience in that you meet many people and learn about the issues that are important to the community. On the minus side, it is very time-consuming so you must be prepared to reorganize your life during a campaign. Having been involved in City government for over 24 years combined as a municipal lawyer and elected official, I was familiar with how cities run, what the issues are that face cities, and how to effectively govern so I knew what to expect.
- The "emergency" or "crisis" situations that occur - they impact the personal life.

5. What advice do you have for prospective elected officials, commission, or committee members?

City Commission Committee

- Take the first step and get involved.
- Willing to give their time and share their expertise.
- Seek out current and prior members of the commission/committee/council, talk to city staff or other community leaders.
- Referring to item 4, I would advise new officials to educate themselves, even at a very high level, on the "big picture" of how the city government functions as part of their education on their special function. This is even more true for new city council members.
- Make sure you are willing to put in the time and effort because you are probably not going to get anywhere near enough in thanks to balance the frustration.
- Be yourself. Do not try to be what you think the voters want you to be. Be prepared to make tough, unpopular decisions. Work hard. Be friendly and nice. Be humble. Do not be a bully.
- Accept that the community, and resulting interests is broader than you expect. Be open to new ideas. Be ready to listen to and appreciate dialog that is usually intelligent and insightful.

School District Committee

- Talk with others who have served in the position you are considering. Become knowledgeable on the subject matter.
- Have a sense of humor, listen, compromise, and stay committed to the job you were elected or appointed to.

- Don't succumb to pressure. Do what is right.
- Be prepared to attend all or most of the meetings, listen respectfully to what is said or presented, and make reasonable and reasoned decisions that you truly believe are in the best interest of the community as a whole.
- Make sure you are willing to put in the time and effort because you are probably not going to get anywhere near enough in thanks to balance the frustration.
- Don't be afraid to piss people off.
- Spend time understanding all the issues and talk with people with a variety of positions. For example, the Blair Park controversy is an example of a private group pressuring the Council and even though the athletic fields may be a good idea, the Council appears to not be listening to all sides.
- Learn as much as you can before you accept a significant position. On-the-job training always occurs, but it's better not to spend the first year or so not knowing enough to contribute fully.

School Board

- There is a lot to learn about our city and schools. I would encourage everyone to start by volunteering for a commission or committee. And I would encourage experienced and knowledgeable volunteers to run for elected positions.
- You can't please all the people all the time but decisions have to be made; make your decisions with broadest range of interests possible but the benefits for the students should come at the top of the list. There will be very stressful situations and decisions that need to be made. The job is rewarding. Many people say it's a "thankless" job but you will find that people from Piedmont thank you on a regular basis. It helps to have a lot of flexibility in your work schedule. The main Board meetings are at night but there are quite a few day time meetings that are important to attend, also.
- If you have a desire to help your community, and are willing to commit the time necessary to do it well, then Piedmont needs you.
- You should be willing to put in lots of time, thought, and emotional energy.
- Remember that democracy and affecting change takes time. Spend time getting to know members of our community - those who helped make our community what it is today as well as those who are helping shape its future.

City Council

- Having patience, being open-minded, willingness to listen to all opinions, don't let emotions get in the way, doing your homework to make informed decisions.
- Remember that you are there to contribute, and "non carborundum illegitimi est."
- The routine can be handled but be prepared for a varied work load as crises come and go.
- Maintain an open mind, listen to all sides, and know that you are one vote such that your ability to work with your colleagues is important to moving matters forward.

6. Please share any insights or thoughts that have not been covered.

City Commission or Committee

- It seems to me that boards or councils are better served when they focus on decisions involving the big picture, which requires "staff" to prepare more alternatives with discussion of recommendations rather than having the board or council as a whole try to figure things out itself.

School District Committee

- Listen to the staff and support them. Question what does not sound correct. Ask probing questions. Don't jump to conclusions. Be willing to compromise.
- It is both an honor and a privilege to serve the citizens of Piedmont. I have done in the past and would hope to continue doing so in the future. Furthermore, it might be nice if we could return to the "Greek model" wherein everyone was "required" to serve one's community in one fashion or another. To be sure, in those days it was only males who could or had to serve, but today it could and would be everyone - males and females alike. If we all are going to share in the fruits of a free and democratic society, then we also should be prepared to accept the burdens associated with helping that free and democratic society prosper. End of sermon.
- It seems to me that boards or councils are better served when they focus on decisions involving the big picture, which requires "staff" to prepare more alternatives with discussion of recommendations rather than having the board or council as a whole try to figure things out itself.
- Working together takes commitment from all.
- It would be good to talk about the extent to which there are (or aren't) unspoken assumptions about 'how we do things here' or 'how things are done here'; and about any topics that turn out to be particularly sensitive or even taboo ...
- We are blessed as a community by your efforts.
- Great concise questionnaire.

School Board

- Our community and schools are run by dedicated volunteers who agree to contribute their time and expertise for an important cause. I would encourage any interested candidates to get involved in any way they can.
- Hopefully, from my perspective, you are in a competitive campaign. The public will benefit most greatly from having a competitive campaign during which the public gets to learn about the candidates. A competitive campaign is both time consuming and expensive. Minimum cost is probably \$5,000 and you can easily spend \$10,000 or more. Being on a Board is a learning experience. Working with 4 other equal members is something to learn how to do. A Board is a multi-headed monster and, at least, three of the heads need to be thinking the same thing for any action to be taken. Nevertheless, in a small community like Piedmont, a Board is strongest when the Board can act unanimously. On the other hand, good, healthy debate is important and Board members should be comfortable with disagreement. After a contested decision is made by a Board, all members of the Board must be ready to support the majority decision.

- I have found that in addition to becoming a better listener, I have learned how important it is to ask the right questions. For me, being a school board member has been an extremely rewarding experience.

City Council

- Get to know your community by volunteering for a City/School committee/commission. Take the time to seek out and listen to the concerns of citizens.
- Having the family support and understanding for serving the community, especially for the late nights and time away from home; appreciation from the community and having a good sense of pride and accomplishment for one's contributions makes it all worthwhile to serve.
- You meet a wonderful class of people when you volunteer, and you'll be helping maintain Piedmont as a great place to live.

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