



Historical Society of Long Beach

REPRESENTED
AT LAST



The Transformation of Long Beach's People and Politics



People gathered on Belmont Shore with the Belmont Olympic Pool in background, circa 1980s

Represented at Last!
The Transformation of Long Beach's People and Politics explores the evolution of the city's political and demographic landscapes. It highlights how self-determination and community empowerment enabled historically underrepresented communities to gain political power in Long Beach.

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The Historical Society of Long Beach collects, preserves and presents local history. Through historical collections, exhibitions, and programs we connect people to the past and to the place they live. We present an inclusive community narrative and help create greater understanding of our neighborhood, the city and its place in the larger world. Through our programs, exhibitions, and collections we engage the community in thinking about what makes Long Beach unique.

The Historical Society of Long Beach recognizes that we are on the traditional and sacred lands of the Tongva, Kizh, Acjachemen, Chumash, and many other indigenous people. We honor and extend gratitude to all of the original people who still live in this region.



Historical Society of Long Beach
4260 Atlantic Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90807
562.424.2220 • www.hslb.org

Public Hours
Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 1pm - 5pm
Thursday 1pm-7pm / Saturday 11am-5pm
Admission is Free

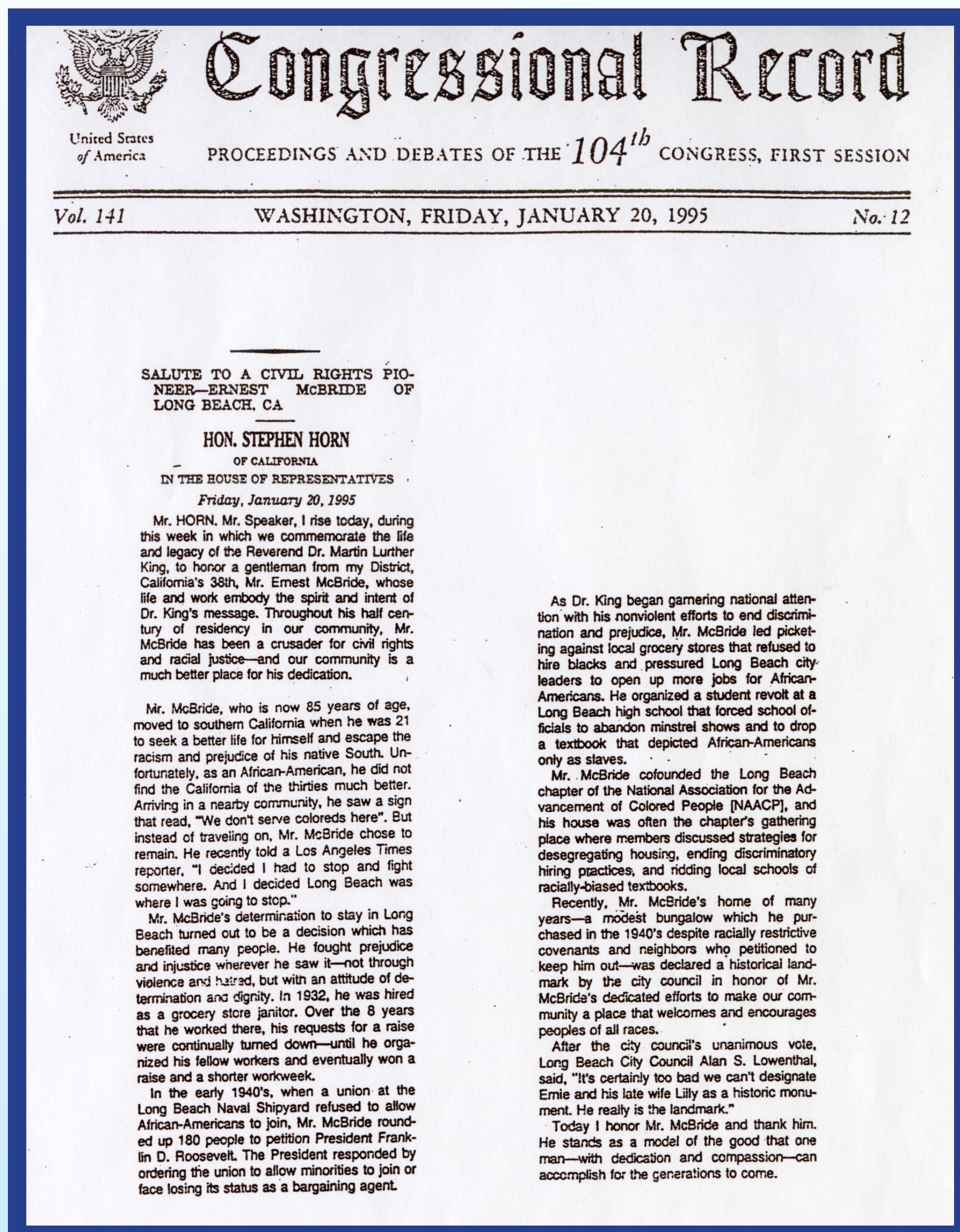




From Iowa by the Sea to Phenomenal Opportunity

Represented at Last!
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World War II provided new opportunities for women and people of color. From the late 1950s through the 1970s, diverse groups came together through social movements such as the Civil Rights, Black Power, American Indian, Local Sacred Sites, and Feminist movements. These burgeoning social movements and growing national and international pressure led President Lyndon B. Johnson to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legally ending segregation and ensuring all citizens the right to vote.

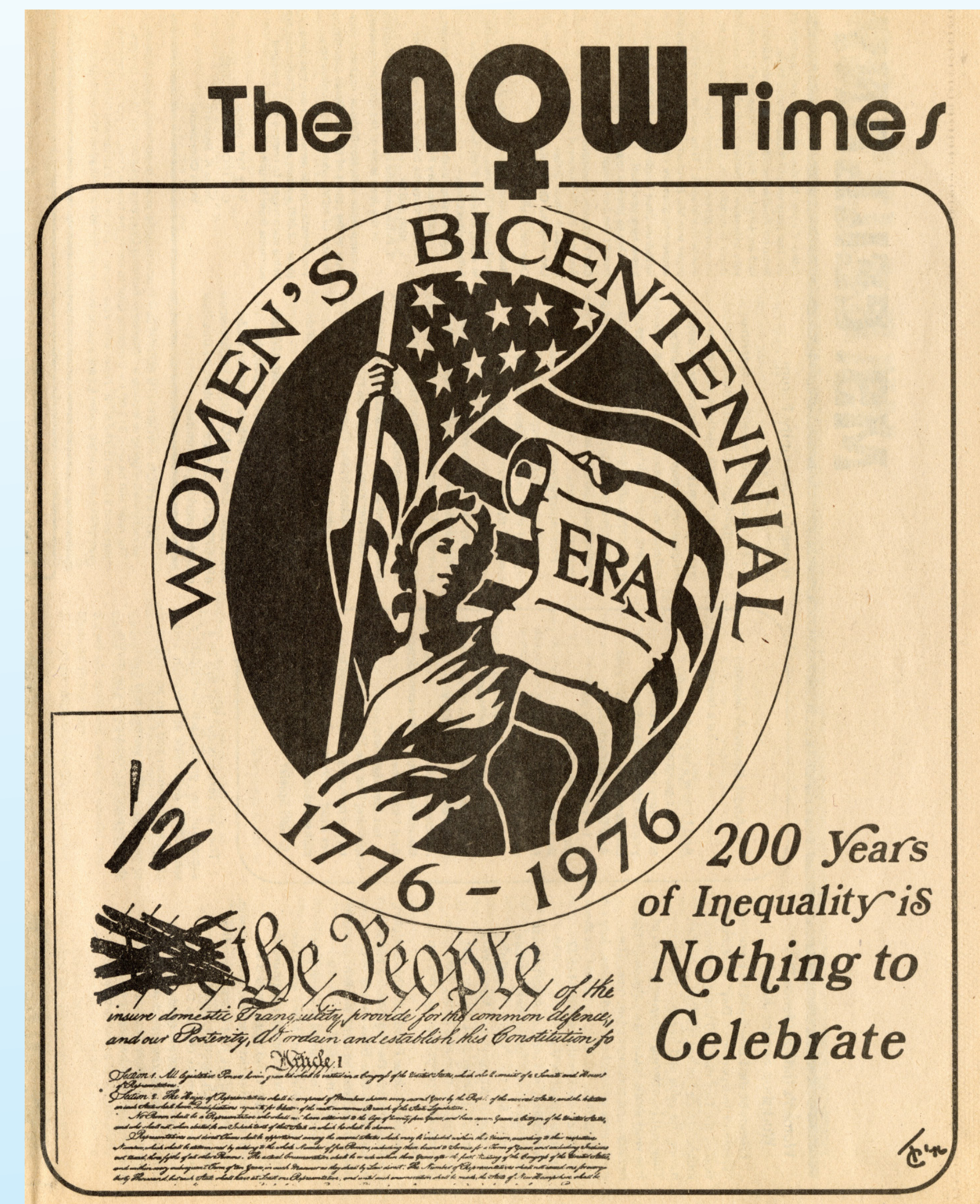


Congressional Record "Salute to a Civil Rights Pioneer-Ernest McBride of Long Beach, CA," given by the Honorable Stephen Horn honoring Ernest McBride, founder of the Long Beach chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 1995

These international and national events contributed to changes in Long Beach's political representation and local elections. The election of James "Jim" Howard Wilson in 1970, the first African American councilmember, marked an end to an all white city council. Following his election, there was a slow rise in political representation from communities who previously had little political power.



Independent Press Telegram Article "City's First Council Woman 'I like Work,' Says Ruth Bach After 7 Busy Months in Office," details D5 Councilwoman (1954-1955) Bach's experience working on city council, 1955



The National Organization for Women (NOW) Los Angeles regional newsletter criticizing the lack of women's rights during the highly celebrated U.S. bicentennial, 1976



Councilwoman D7 (1975-1986) Sato Letterhead 1986



Long Beach City Council with first African American Councilmember, Jim Wilson, circa 1970



Mayor Beverly O'Neill (1994-2006) with folklorico dancers at first district public safety fair, 2002

Another significant step toward equality was LBJ's "War on Poverty" through The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which provided assistance in the form of healthcare, nutrition, and education. Social service organizations in Long Beach used federal funds for Head Start, the Community Improvement League, and the Centro de la Raza.

Meanwhile, U.S. foreign policy in the second half of the 20th century and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 removed the national origins quotas that limited immigration from certain countries. This drastically increased Asian, Latin American, Eastern European, and African immigration, significantly changing Long Beach demographics.



Suon Thach leading Cambodians at the Long Beach Civic Center to protest Vietnam getting out of Cambodia, circa 1983



Los Angeles Times California section on Robert Garcia's vision for Long Beach, 2015

Immigration, changing demographics, social movements, and community organizations resulted in new local leaders. Elected city council representatives transformed from blocking the Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride parade in the early 1980s, to First District Councilmember Robert Garcia, the first Latinx and openly gay mayor. The once all white, all male city council became a supermajority of women representing many different cultures headed by the first African American mayor, and the first mayor who lives in North Long Beach, Rex Richardson.



Poly High School Black Power demonstration with Alfred Jones on the roof, 1968



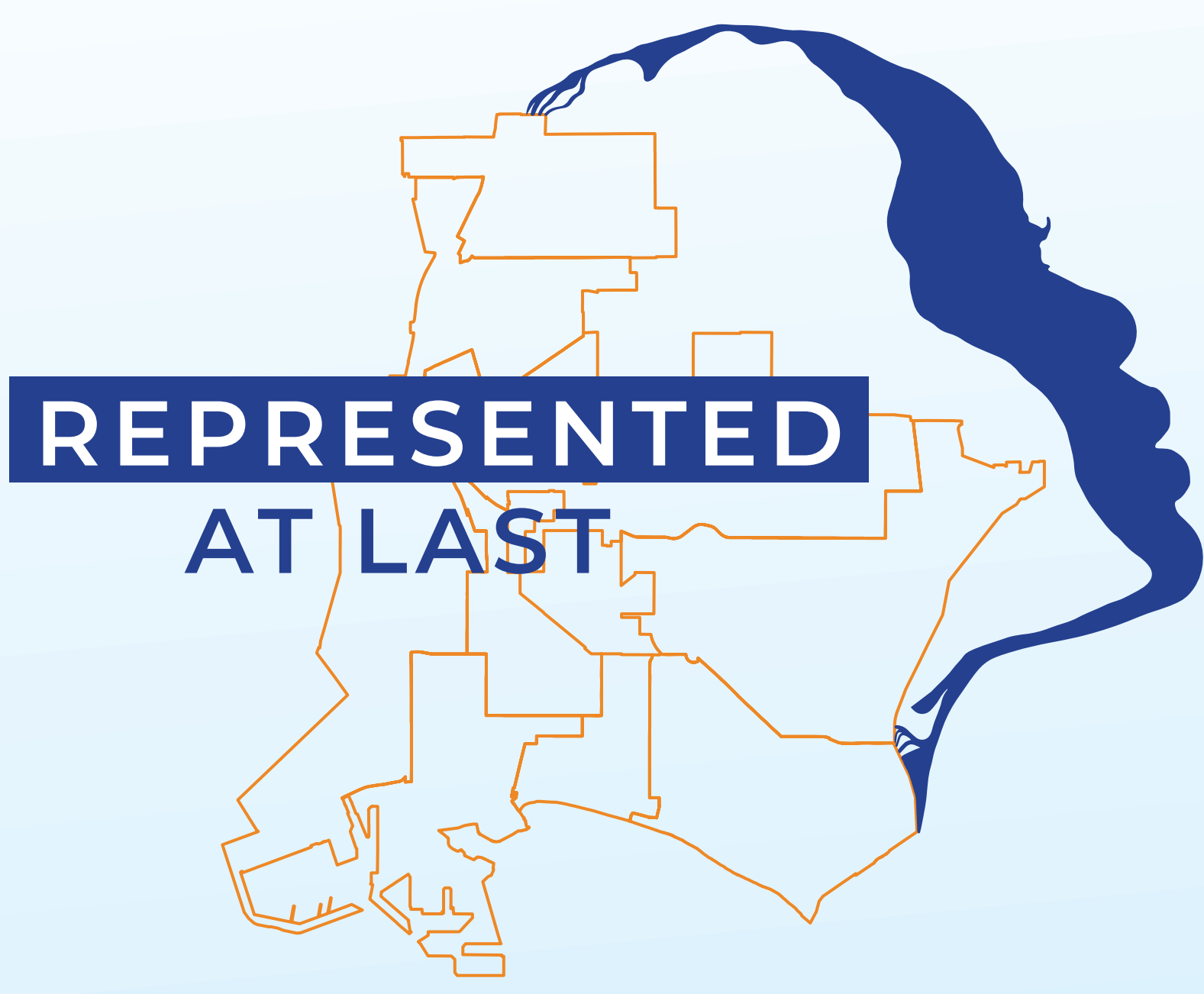
First Black Mayor Rex Richardson, his wife Nina Richardson, and their two children celebrating on election night 2022

The Historical Society of Long Beach hopes these stories engage, empower, and inspire our community.



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Changing Population Changing Electorate

Since the late 1800s, Long Beach has been home to Indigenous, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, African American, Latinx, and White populations, however, they were a fraction of the population and lacked political power. Despite their small numbers, these communities challenged the indignities they faced and pushed for equality.

CHUMASH MAN

"Shoo-mash," he says
and when he says it
I think of ancient sea lion hunts
and salt spray windswept
across my face
They tell him
his people are dead
"Terminated"

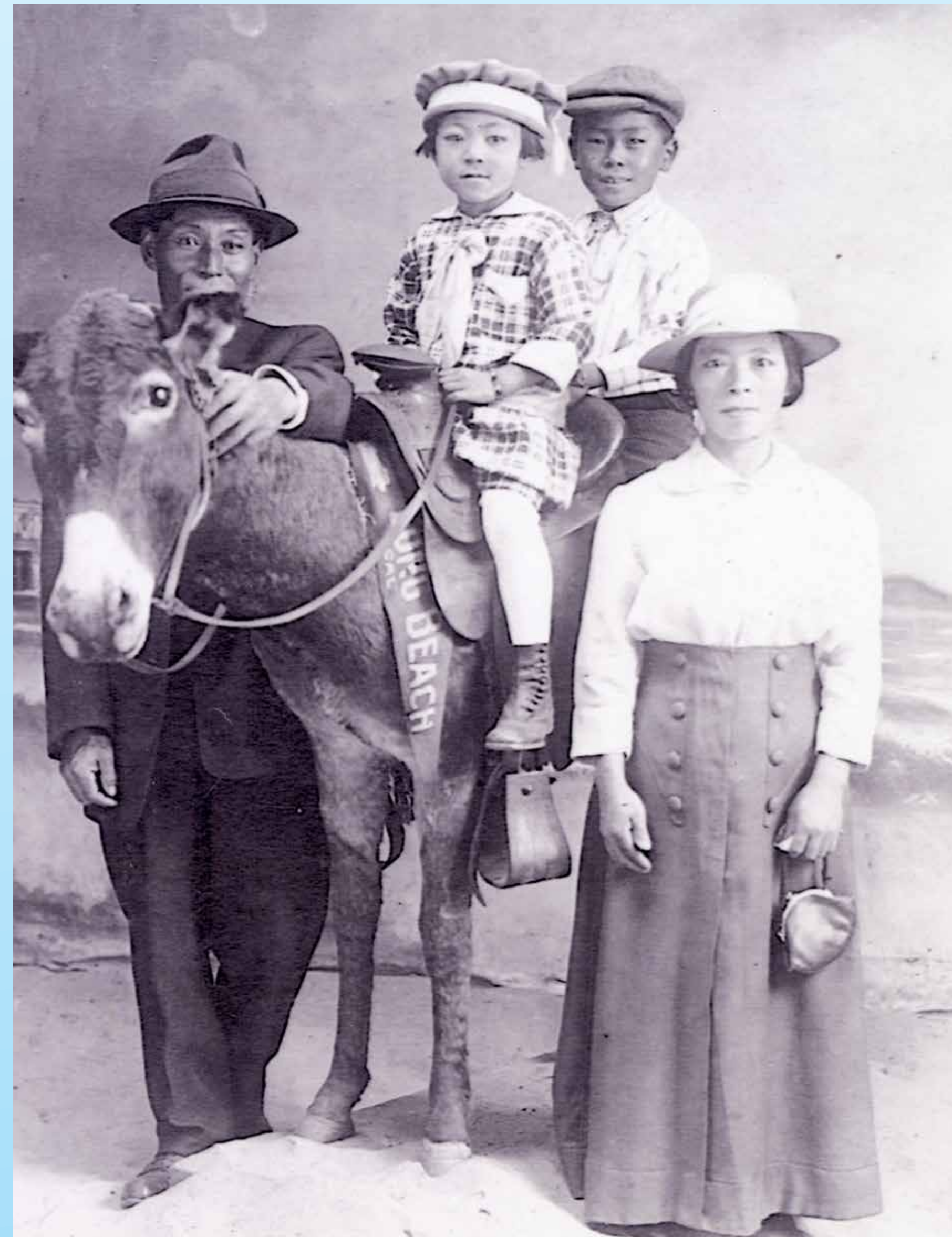
It's official
U.S. rubber-stamped official
Chumash: Terminated
a People who died
they say
a case for anthropologists

Ah, but this old one
this old one whose face is
ancient prayers come to rest
this old one knows
who he is

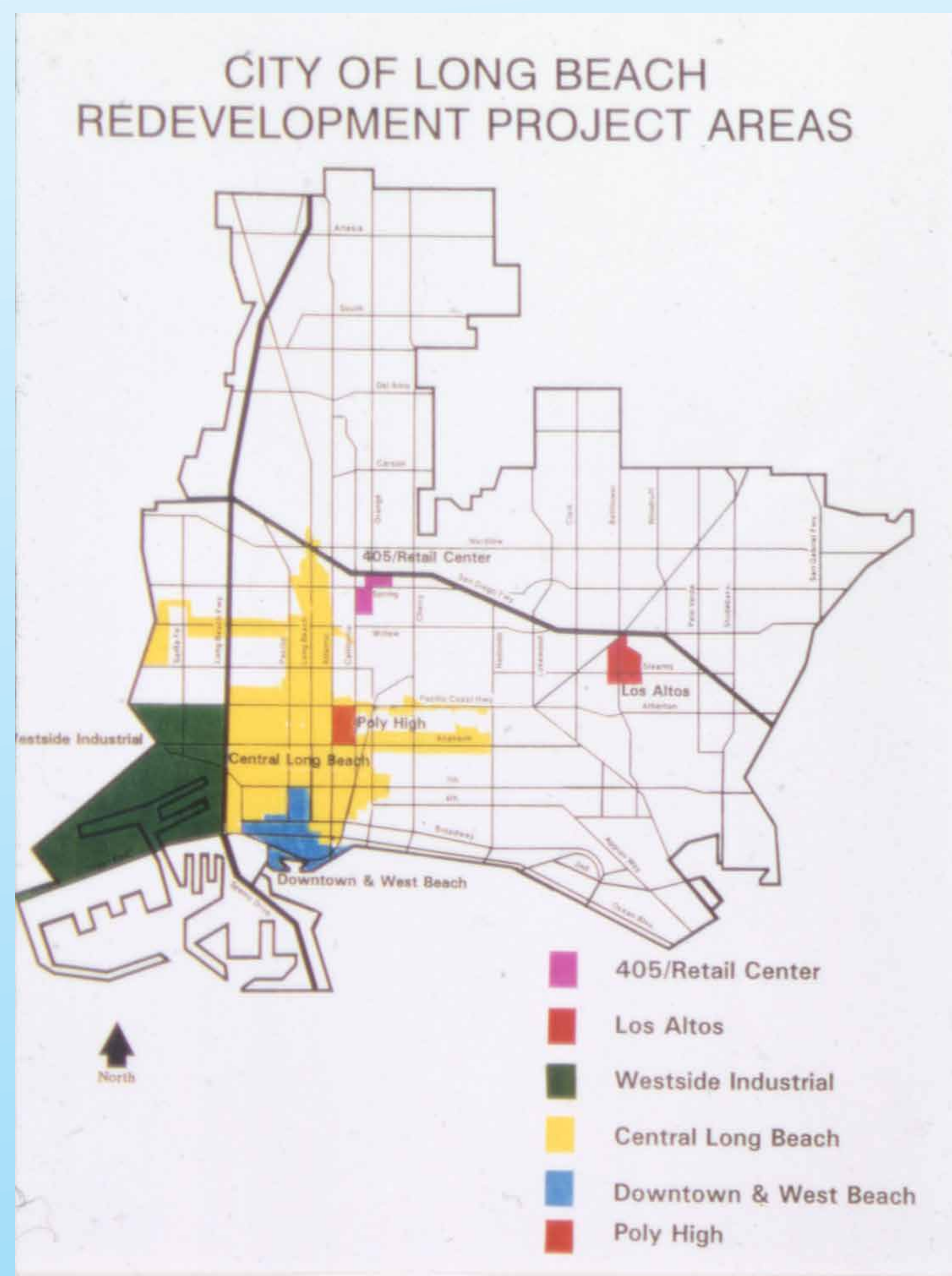
"Shoo-mash," he says
and somewhere sea lions still gather
along the California coast
and salt spray
rises
rainbow mist
above the constant breaking
of the waves

- Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez

Poem written by Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez, 2021



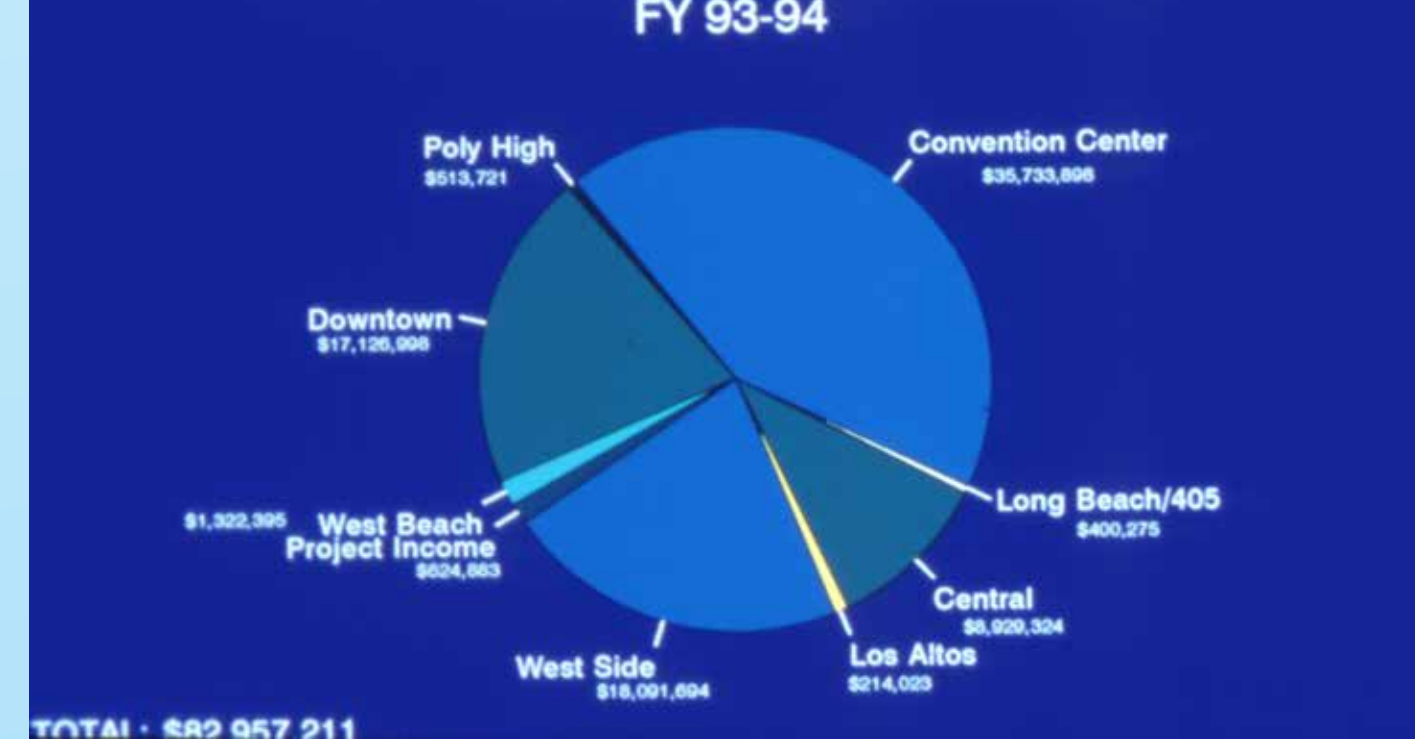
Asian family photo at the Pike, circa 1905



City of Long Beach Redevelopment Project Areas Map, first focused on Downtown, West Beach, Central and Westside, North Long Beach is notably absent as a project area, circa 1990

WHAT IS REDEVELOPMENT?
A process created by State law to assist the City in eliminating blight from an area, and to revitalize an area plagued by social, economic, and physical conditions which act as a barrier to new investments.
California Redevelopment Law is one of the last available processes which has the authority, scope, and financial means to provide the necessary stimulus to reverse deteriorating trends, remedy blight, and create a new impetus for many communities.
Community redevelopment operates under the control of the local governing body.
The Long Beach Redevelopment Agency Board is a 5-member board appointed by the Mayor and City Council to exercise its power to carry out the redevelopment plan.

REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS EXPENDITURES - ESTIMATE TO CLOSE FY 93-94



REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

Redevelopment Plans in Long Beach Are Implemented in seven Project Areas.

Project Area	Formation	Term*	Acreage
West Beach	1964	2009	21
Poly High	1973	2003	87
West Long Beach	1975	2015	1,350
Downtown	1975	2010	421
Los Altos	1991	2031	45
405 Retail Center	1993	2033	76
Central Long Beach	1993	2033	2,819
Total Acreage			4,819
Total Percent of City			11.3%

*Percent to 48 198

Redevelopment plans and expenditures for seven project areas slides, North Long Beach is notably absent, 1993-1994



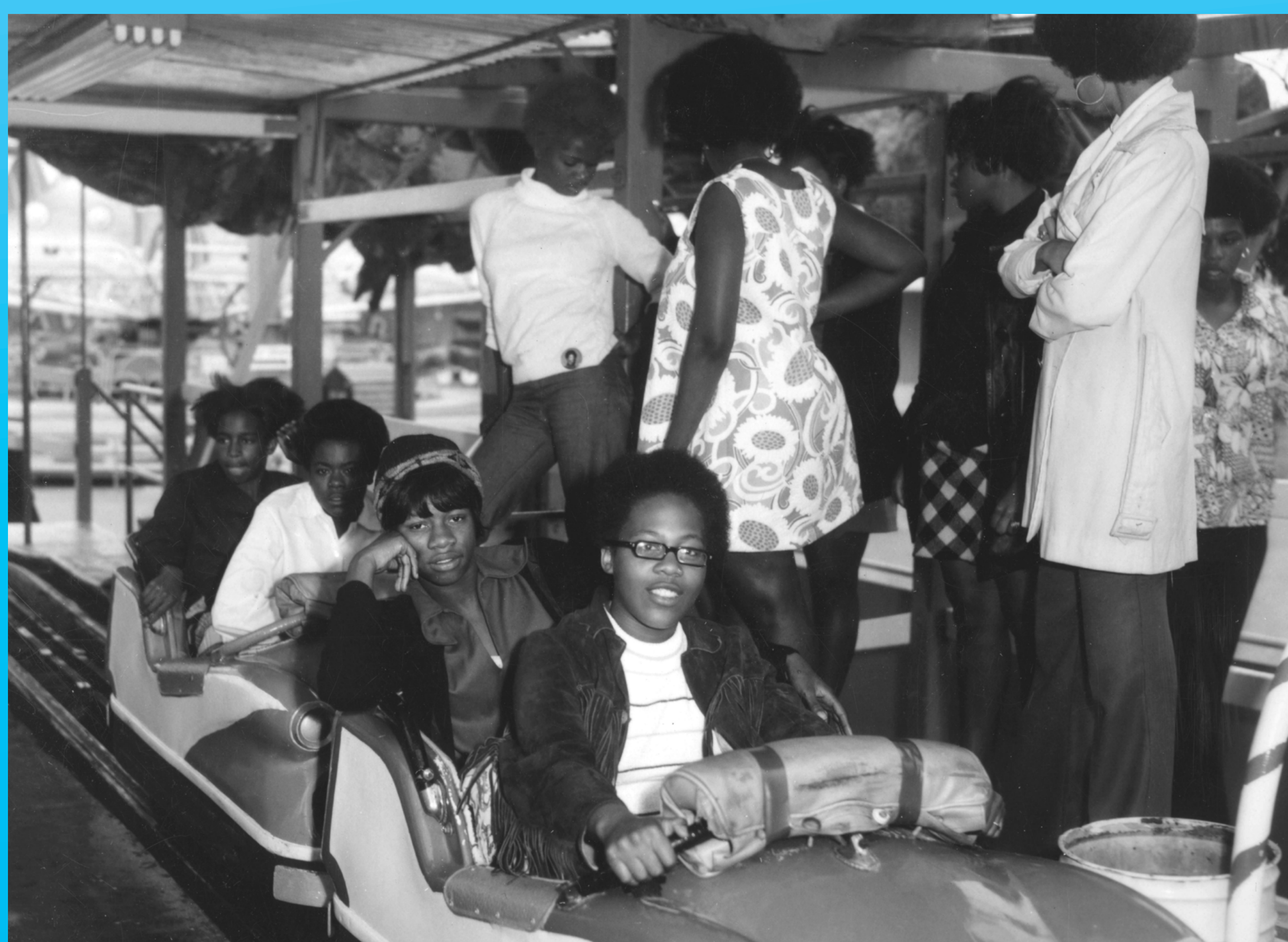
Perez and Navarrete family farm, from left to right: Pilar Perez-Navarrete, Tony Mesa, Eleno Perez, 1935



Diverse CalShip workers receiving training, circa 1943

World War II brought the military industrial complex to Long Beach. The expansion of the Navy and aerospace attracted migrants from across the U.S. The Navy and shipyard were a source of employment for Filipinos like Emmanuel Bernal, African Americans like Malcom Treadwell and Willie F. Brown, and Latinx like George Trujillo and Desiderio Valera Vigil. Similarly, the families of Mayor Rex Richardson, Councilmember Dee Andrews, and Councilmember Al Austin moved to Long Beach in search of economic opportunities and jobs in these industries.

The increase in the African American and other racial and ethnic communities was met with increased racism. Redlining played an instrumental role in keeping the African American population in the Central Area. Other parts of the city, such as Downtown and the Westside, became centers for communities of color before North Long Beach emerged as racially and ethnically diverse as it is today.



African American teenagers at the Pike, circa 1973

U.S. interventions in South East Asia and Latin America were a catalyst for the rapid changes in Long Beach's population beginning in the 1970s. The Central Area shifted from being predominantly African American, to one with refugees from Cambodia and Laos fleeing the effects of the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge.

Country of Citizenship	Fiscal Years 1990-96							
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
All Immigrants	208,876	26,287	114,628	107,556	109,553	106,530	74,771	
Philippines	1,214	1,400	1,472	1,233	21	4	-	
Laos	96	1,261	1,288	493	173	34	23	
Thailand/Hongkong	-	-	-	1,897	2,688	5,879	12,030	
Myanmar	210	587	925	34	5	3	-	
Cambodia	2,566	39	491	22	6	1	-	
China	12	4	1	-	-	-	-	
Laos	4,153	3,915	3,783	3,865	2,975	6,333	3,975	
Cambodia/laos	340	176	18	3	5	-	1	
U.S. born	23	4	2	1	-	-	-	
Other	-	-	-	-	6	-	14	
Others	1,233	1,490	2,072	2,767	328	239	156	
Spain	11	19	2	2	1	0	1	
Hongkong	174	-	24	1,287	3,764	1,481	39	
Iran	3,320	3,075	1,949	1,161	351	978	1,296	
India	107	845	3,443	4,615	4,351	3,462	2,138	
Iran	8,773	8,588	7,911	6,867	6,272	3,971	2,396	
Other	3	1	497	161	439	12	46	
Hongkong	183	87	1	1	1	-	2	
Poland	1,495	200	134	14	31	10	11	
Romania	3,676	4,472	1,459	317	47	34	16	
Canada	21	192	1,770	2,773	3,213	2,566	6,036	
South Africa	4	19	1	-	-	-	-	
South Korea	16,716	16,665	12,229	48,467	45,479	35,716	29,536	
India	9	24	113	244	1,330	1,703	175	
Japan	27	122	69	24	2	10	10	
U.S. born	27,678	27,927	26,090	31,219	34,249	32,244	16,119	
England	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Other	79	79	76	109	92	18	34	

Refugee immigrants arriving in U.S. by country of citizenship, circa 1990-1996.

The arrival of Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, and to an extent, Latinx from Central America, drastically changed the makeup of areas with large concentrations of people of color, perpetuating racial tensions and the rise of ethnic gangs in the 1980s. The sudden influx of political refugees and other groups created scarcity of resources and animosity within historically African American and Latinx communities in Long Beach.



Avi Lowenthal's bar mitzva with Judge Daniel Lowenthal, Avi Lowenthal, and D2 Councilwoman (2006-2016), Suja Lowenthal, August, 2015

Despite the tensions that emerged from the rapid transformation in Long Beach's demographics, there was a rise in inter-ethnic coalitions and collaboration amongst these marginalized groups. These new demographics drastically changed the electorate in Long Beach and created space for new voices to exert their vote and power in the local government.



Jessica Gillete, leader of the Annual Long Beach Filipino American History Month Celebration, October, 2023

OPERATION NEW ARRIVAL
In 1975, Camp Pendleton became the temporary home for thousands of Southeast Asian refugees. On April 26, 1975, the Marines received word that the first refugees would begin arriving the next day.
During "Operation New Arrival," which officially began April 29, 1975, more than 50,000 refugees were processed through the "tent city" located at Camp Pendleton.
GENERAL STATISTICS
Operation New Arrival April 26, 1975 - November 26, 1975
Number of refugees who were processed through the camp-50,424
Number of births-108 (88 boys, 20 girls)
Total hospital admissions-866
Total hospital/dispensary outpatients-117,432
Maximum capacity of camp-18,560
Number of government civilians involved-459
Number of Marines and Navy personnel involved-800
Number of meals served-7,347,456
Number of pairs of shoes issued-7,981
Power lines installed-20 miles
Telephone poles installed-200
Cable installed-34 miles
Number of tents erected-1,040
Number of Quonset huts used-140
Number of blankets used-65,000
Water mains and feeder lines laid-35,000 feet
Shower huts-14 rehabilitated structures
Portable shower units installed-4

Report on Southeast Asian refugees arriving at Camp Pendleton, CA, circa 1975.

COMMITTEE TO ELECT CLARENCE SMITH
2051 ORANGE AVENUE
LONG BEACH, CA 90806
ID #830066

Campaign materials for the Committee to Elect D6 Councilman (1986-1992) Clarence Smith, circa 1986



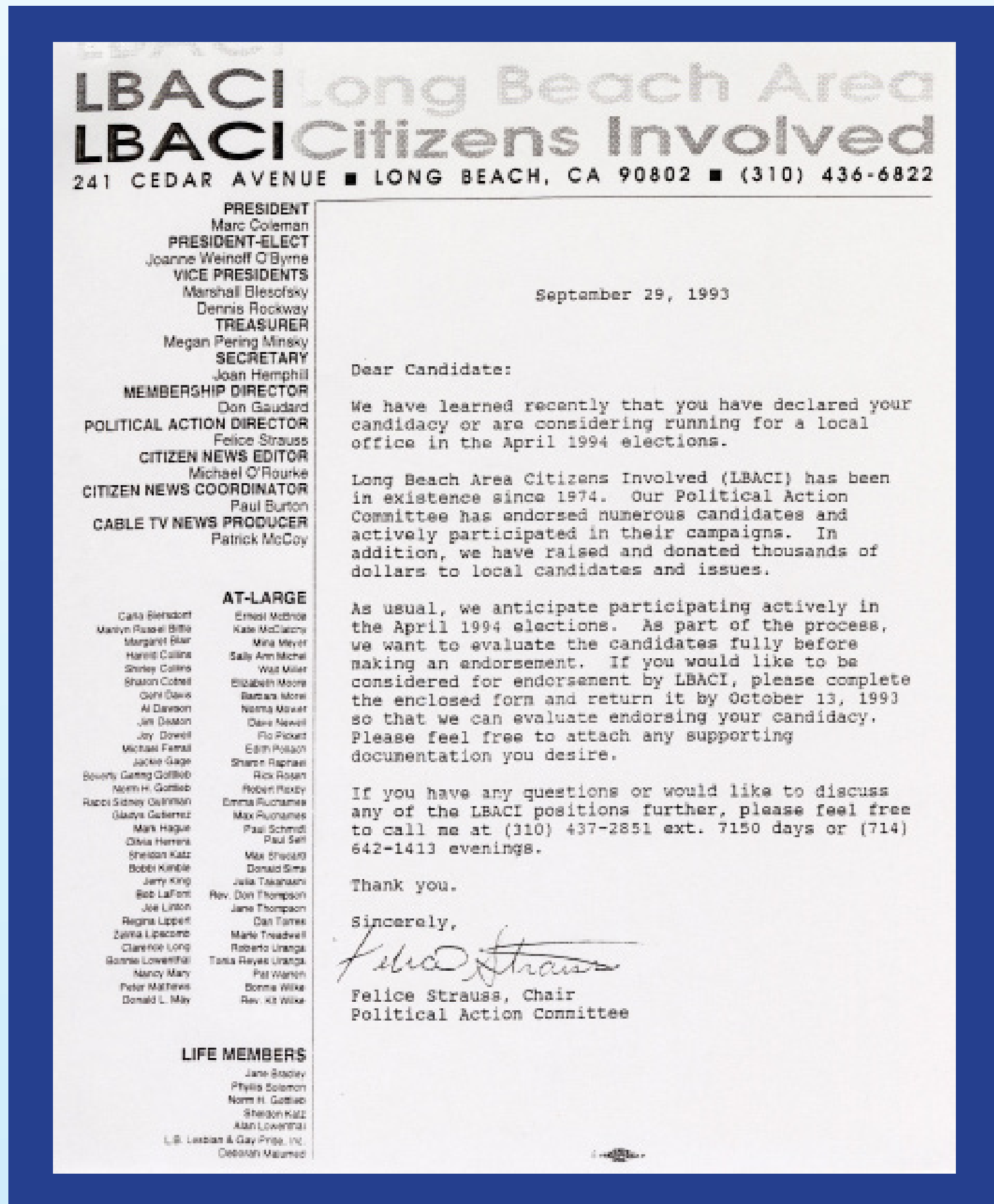
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Political Alliances

To protect minorities' rights and increase representation in local office, many communities in Long Beach created political alliances throughout the late 20th century. Various organizations pushed for political allies and representation in city council to address inequities and support underrepresented groups.



Letter to Tonia Reyes Uranga from Long Beach Area Citizens Involved (LBACI), a progressive political organization, providing steps for campaign endorsement, 1993



ELECT CLARENCE SMITH LONG BEACH CITY COUNCIL
A Dedicated and Committed Leader with a 37 Year Record of Involvement in Long Beach
Vote Tuesday, In August 26th

Campaign material to elect Clarence Smith for Long Beach City Council for Council District 6, circa 1986



Photo of Jenny Oropeza and class of elementary school students pledging allegiance to the flag, campaign material for electing Jenny Oropeza to the Long Beach Unified School District Board, first Latinx to hold a seat on LBUSD, 1988

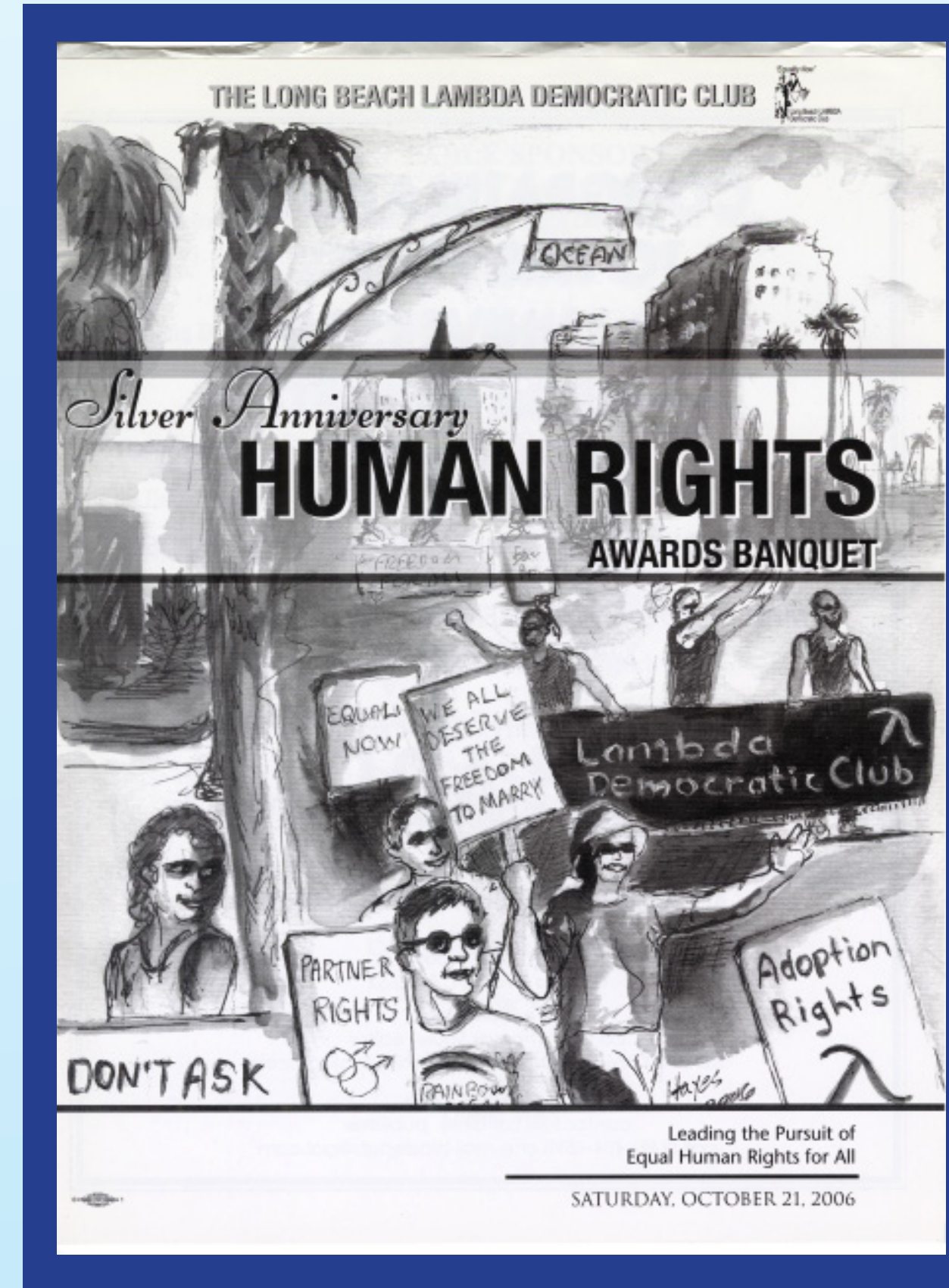
Organizations such as Long Beach Area Citizens Involved (LBACI), League of United Latin American Citizens, Teachers Association of Long Beach (TALB), Democratic Women's Study Club, National Organization for Women, Lambda Democratic Club, and Long Beach Young Democrats supported the election of prominent Long Beach political allies like Jim Wilson, Renee Simon, Alan Lowenthal, Wallace Edgerton, Beverly O'Neill, Tom Clark, Evan A. Braude, and Bonnie Lowenthal.



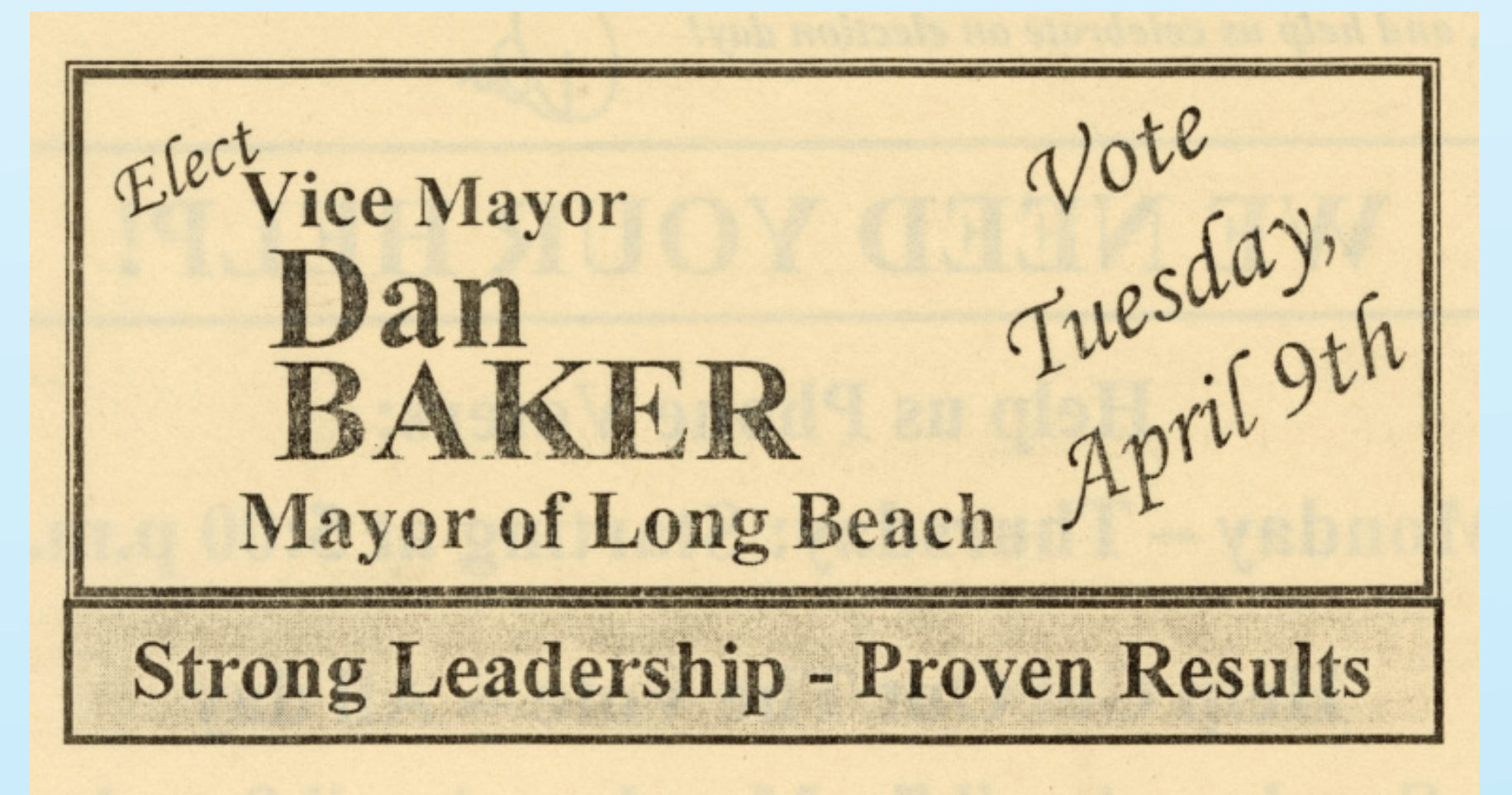
Citizen News "LBACI Takes Care of Business at Garden Party," article discussing LBACI's 22nd Annual Garden Party award ceremony and election of officers, featuring Jenny Oropeza (State Senator D28 2006-2010, State Assembly 2000-2006, Councilwoman 1994-2000; Assembly Member (1988-2004) Alan Lowenthal (U.S. Representative 2013-2023, State Senator 2004-2012, Councilman 1992-1998; and Joanne Weinhoff O'Byrne Poly High School teacher and LBACI member, 1996

"It was also to advance the issues that were not only unique to our community, but so many other communities of color. I think we up ended up doing some good work. And at one point on the city council when I got elected, we literally had three African Americans men, on the city council at one time, which was really punching way beyond our weight class. When you look at the African American population in Long Beach being about 12%, we represented 30% or 33% of the city council, right? So that was that was a significant moment, in our city's history and it showed that, that we, we had politically figured out something. And then other communities started saying, 'Hey, wait a minute. We can do this too!'"

-Councilmember Al Austin 2024



Flyer for the Long Beach Lambda Democratic Club's Silver Anniversary Human Rights Awards Banquet, 2006



Campaign material for electing Dan Baker as mayor, 2002

Similar to the creation of cultural community groups, there was also an emergence of political organizations tied to marginalized communities. For example, Centro de la Raza employees and participants formed the Long Beach Chicano Political Caucus (CPC) in the late 1970s to raise funds for candidates and register Latinx voters which amplified their voices. CPC members worked on Wilson's and Simon's campaigns, both allies to the Latinx community. The Latinx community also partnered with LBACI to enact change through the local ballot initiative process. LBACI was one of the instrumental organizations that advocated for Proposition X, which passed in 1976 and required city councilmembers to live in the council district that they served.



Mayor Beverly O'Neill, Councilmembers Bonnie Lowenthal D1, Dan Baker D2, Frank Colonna D3, Dennis Carroll D4, Jackie Kell D5, Laura Richardson D6, Rob Webb D8, Val Learch D9, circa 2002

Local measures, such as Proposition X, helped bring in new councilmembers who supported expanded civil rights. In 1987, Lambda and TALB pushed for a successful city ordinance that prohibited discrimination against sexual preference at work and in hiring practices. Lambda continued to support allies to the LGBTQ+ community, like Evan A. Braude, and eventually were able to support individuals from their community. In 1999, Dan Baker became the first openly gay city councilmember. Gerrie Schipske became the first lesbian on city council in 2006. Robert Garcia won his city council race in 2009, and became Long Beach's first openly gay Latinx Mayor in 2014.



(Far left) Gerrie Schipske, former D5 Councilwoman (2006-2014); (Second from left) President of the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners (2024-present) Bonnie Lowenthal, former D1 Councilwoman (2001-2008); (Back row, middle) Bill Clinton, former U.S. President (1993-2001); (Middle) Suja Lowenthal, former D2 Councilwoman (2006-2016); (Third from right) Tonia Reyes Uranga, former D7 Councilwoman (2002-2010), circa 2007



Steve Neal, D9 Councilman (2010-2014), first African American elected to city council from North Long Beach; (Middle) Tonia Reyes Uranga, D7 Councilwoman (2002-2010); (Right) Gil Cedillo, attending a labor event, date unknown

After 1972, councilmembers Renee Simon and Jim Wilson often sat with the city manager to push for city employment opportunities for women and racial/ethnic minorities. Additional coalitions paved the way for individuals from underrepresented communities to win elected positions like Doris Topsy-Elvord, Jenny Oropeza, and Dan Baker in the 1990s, and Tonia Reyes Uranga, Gerrie Schipske, Roberto Uranga, and Suely Saro in the 2000s.



Former Vice-Chair of National Democratic Party (1993) Carmen O. Perez; State Senator D28 (2006-2010) former State Assemblywoman (2000-2006) former D1 Councilwoman (1994-2000) Jenny Oropeza at Lambda Democratic Club Human Rights Awards Banquet at the Queen Mary, 1996



Sandy Blankenship, first Cambodian woman to run for city council, speaking at event for Bonnie Lowenthal's School Board campaign, circa 1994



Celebrating marriage equality State Senator D33 (2019-present) Lena Gonzalez (former D1 Councilwoman 2014-2019); Councilwoman Suja Lowenthal D2 (2006-2016) birthplace India; U.S. Congressman D42 (2023-present) Robert Garcia (former Mayor 2014-2022, Councilman D1 2009-2014) birthplace Peru, 2010



Filipino History Event at city council with Councilwoman D6 (2020-present) Suely Saro; Councilman D7 (2014-present) Roberto Uranga; Filipina residents Elaine Bernal D8 and Jessica Gillette D2



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Community Organizations and Empowerment

Since the 1910s, members from the African American community voiced their grievances to city council. Continuous organizing and efforts in the African American community culminated in 1940 when Ernest McBride founded the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP provided communities of color with an avenue to fight systemic oppression. In 1970, these organizing skills and resources helped elect Jim Wilson, Long Beach's first African American councilmember D6. He won in a special election on April 7, 1970 with support from the African American and Latinx communities.



Long Beach Chicano Political Caucus fundraiser at the home of Ron and Phyllis Arias (lower left); unknown attendee, Long Beach Vice Mayor Jim Wilson (center), CPC co-chair Carmen O. Perez, David C. Lizarraga, circa 1980



Long Beach Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Freedom Fund Banquet and Awards Presentation invitation, 2004

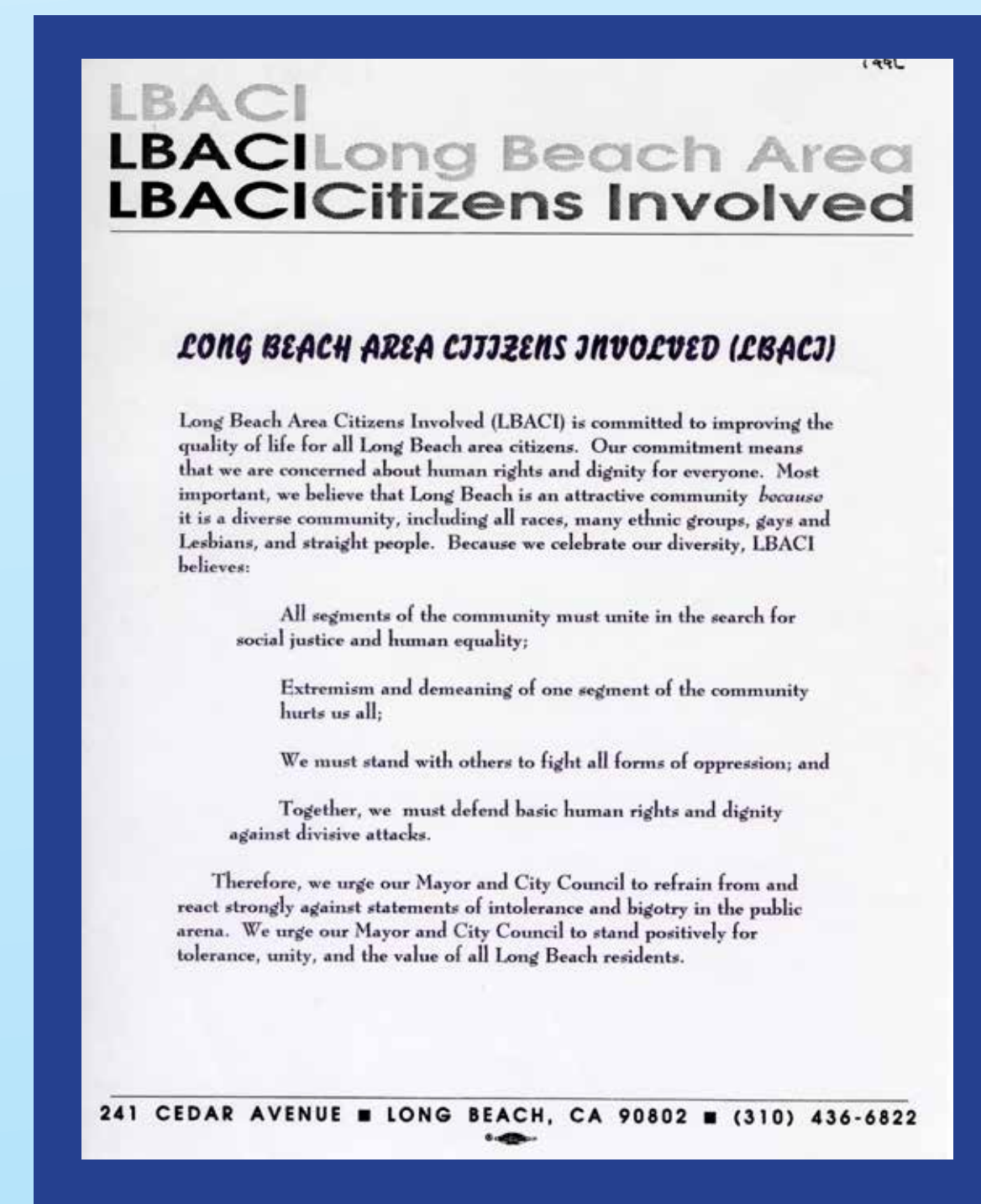


Cambodian Association of America Logo, founded 1975

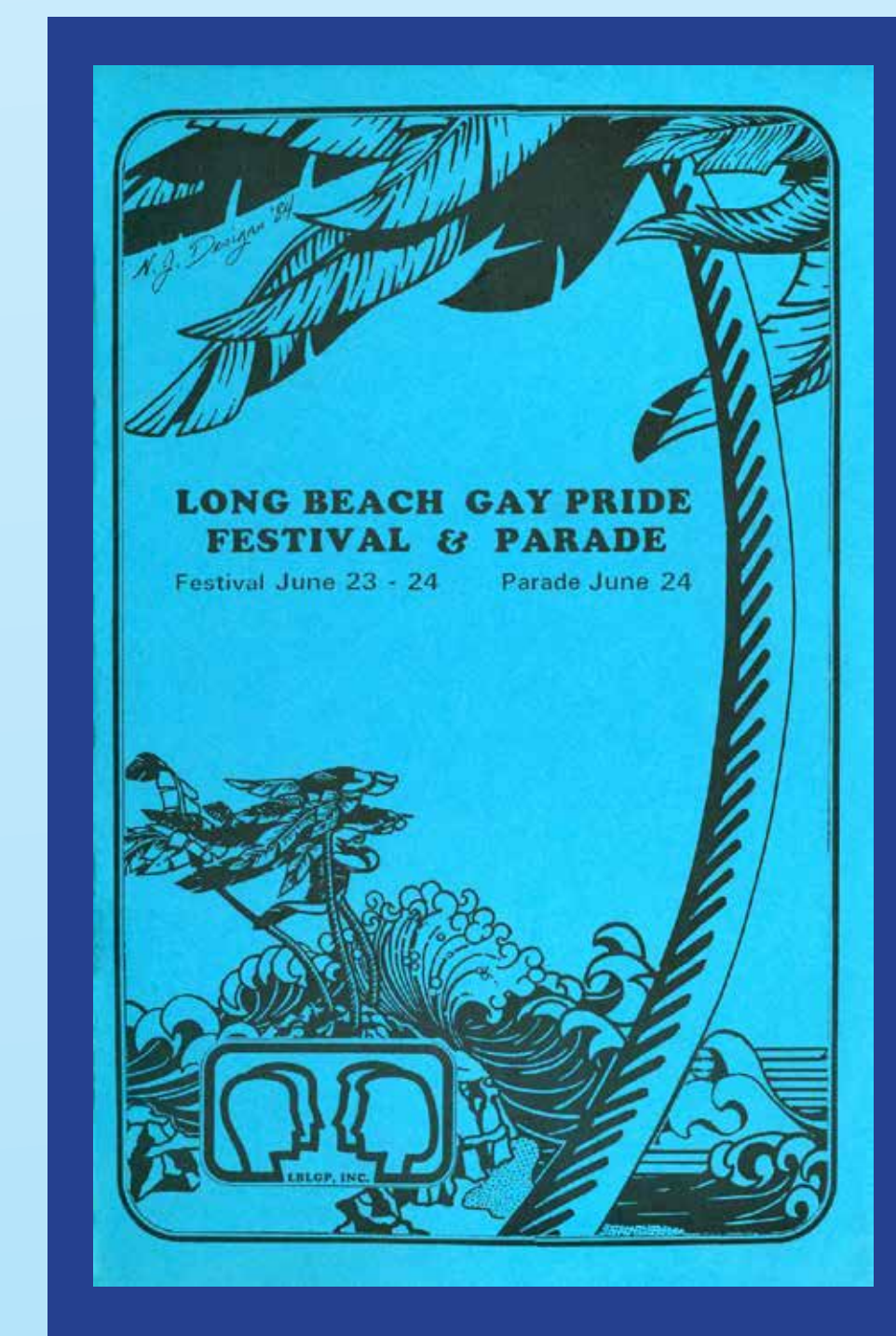


Guest card for a mysterious North Long Beach Young Democratic Club, date unknown

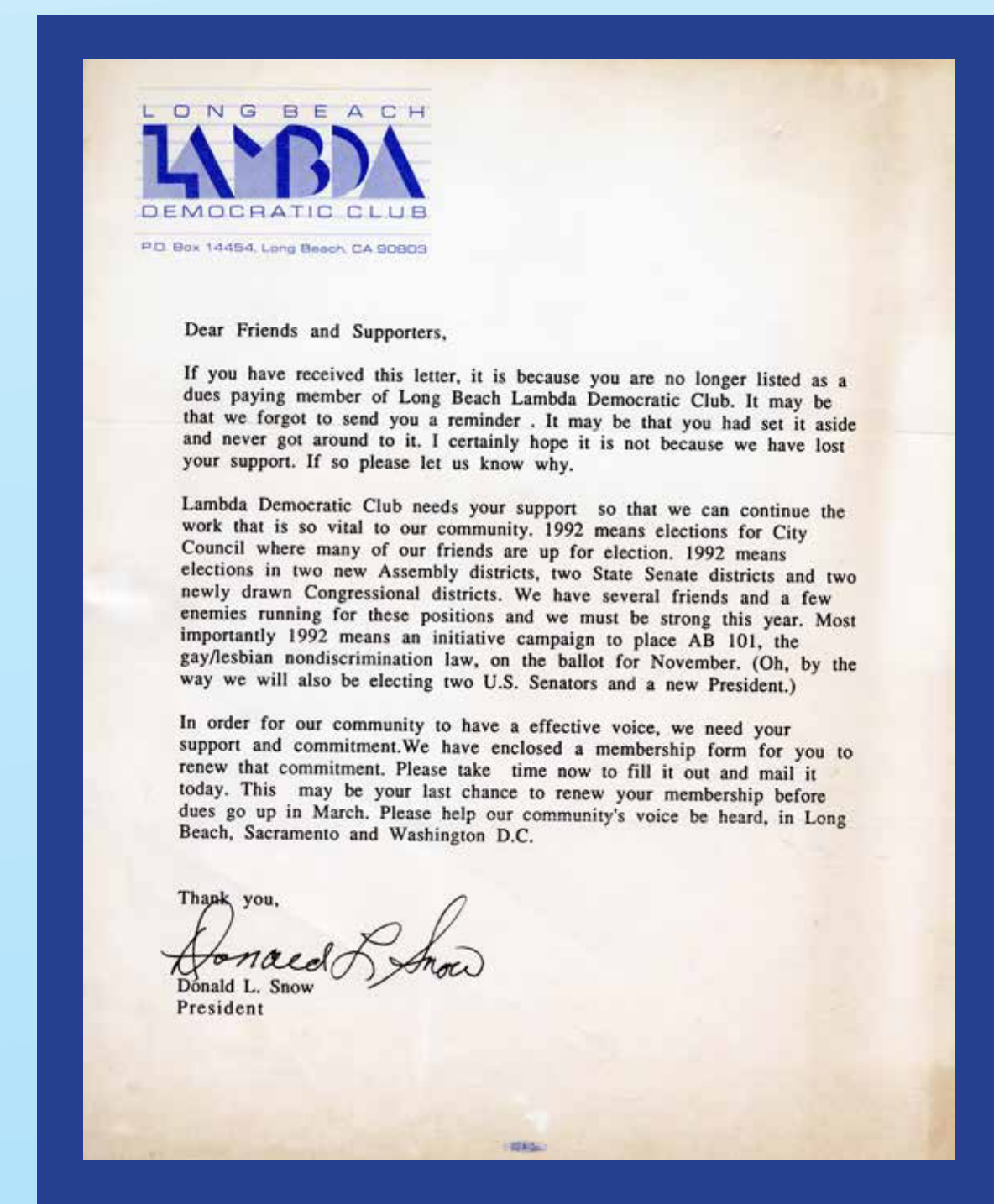
Founded in 1977, the Long Beach Lambda Democratic Club engaged with the community and supported LGBTQ+ friendly politicians, like councilmember and congressman, Alan Lowenthal, and later supported Dan Baker, who would become the first out gay councilmember in the city. In the 2010s, Lambda worked to expand civil rights on issues like marriage equality. The Center also provided services to the Long Beach LGBTQ+ community, including one of the first case management services exclusively for people with AIDS/HIV.



Long Beach Area Citizens Involved mission statement flyer



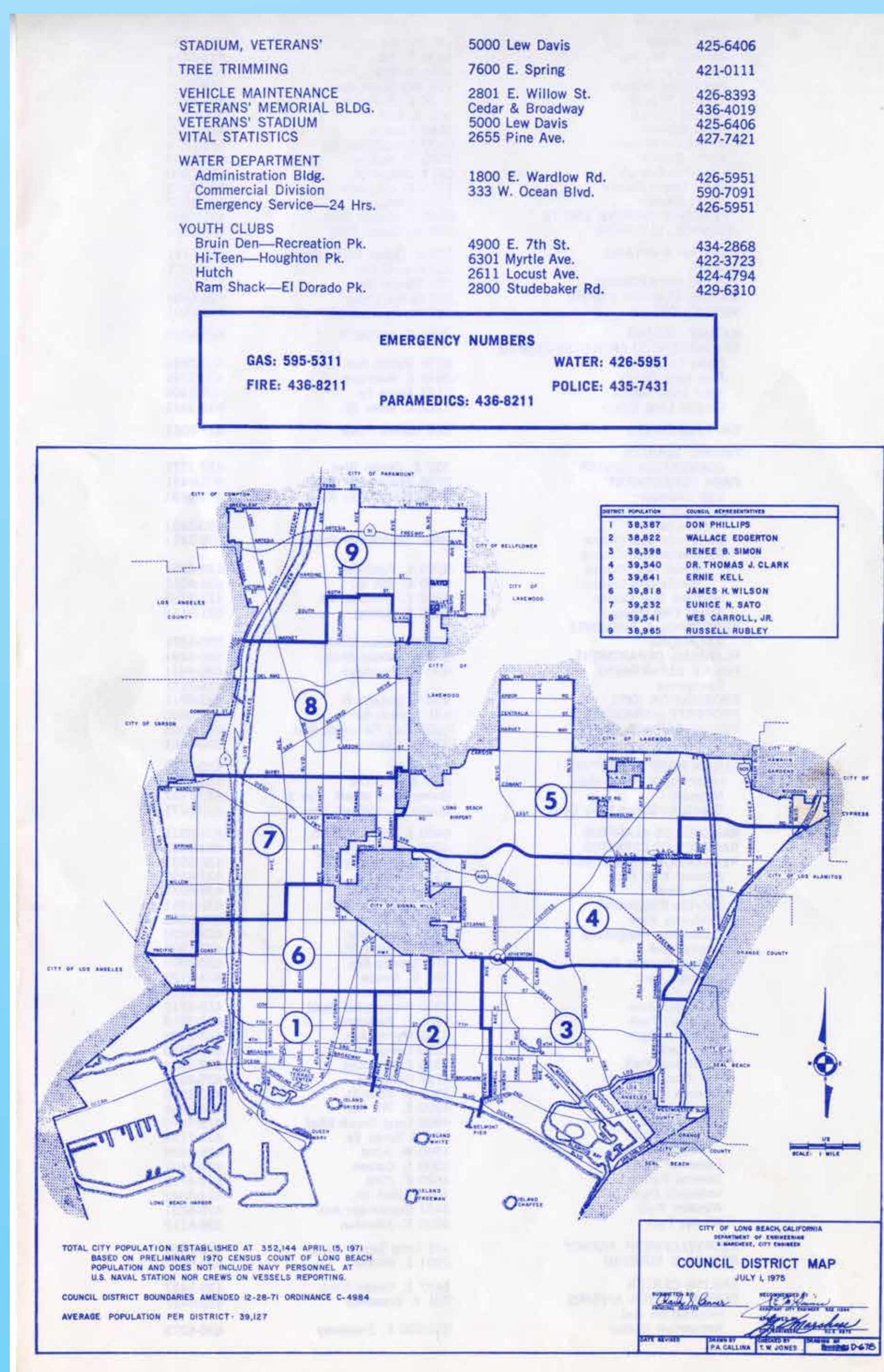
First Long Beach Gay Pride Festival & Parade, LBLGP, Inc., 1984



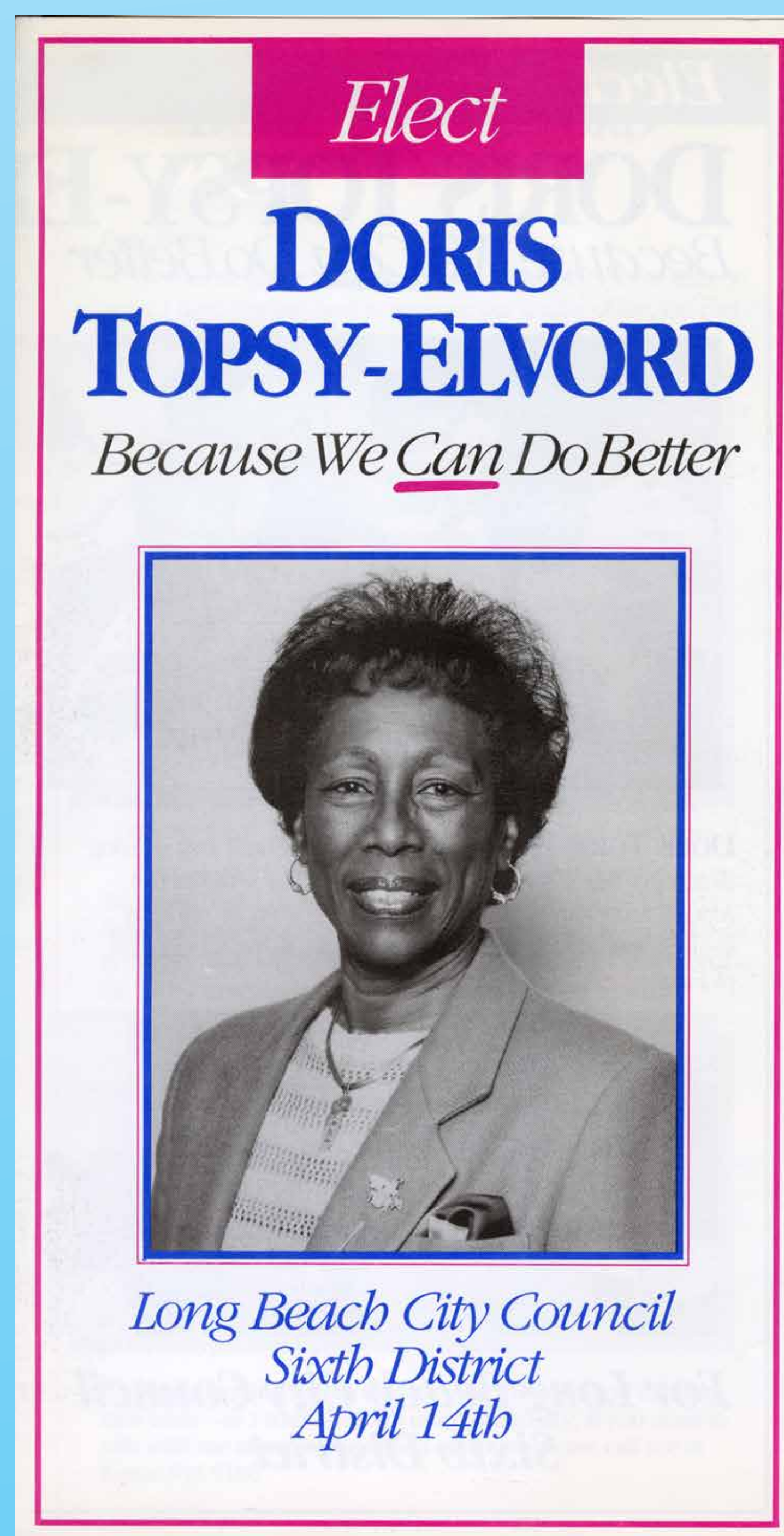
Long Beach Lambda Democratic Club membership renewal letter asserting support for state gay/lesbian nondiscrimination legislation, 1992

Meanwhile, increases in federal funding helped create anti-poverty organizations that addressed socioeconomic disparities in education, healthcare, and nutrition. Five neighborhood centers, including Centro de la Raza (East Long Beach Neighborhood Center), were founded in the 1970s and assisted their communities with employment, education, and other resources. The centers helped people, connected activists, empowered participants, and provided the tools to organize political campaigns. Some participants, such as Tonia Reyes Uranga, ran for political office, while others, like Carmen O. Perez, assisted in the campaigns of Jenny Oropeza, Alan Lowenthal, and Jerry Brown.

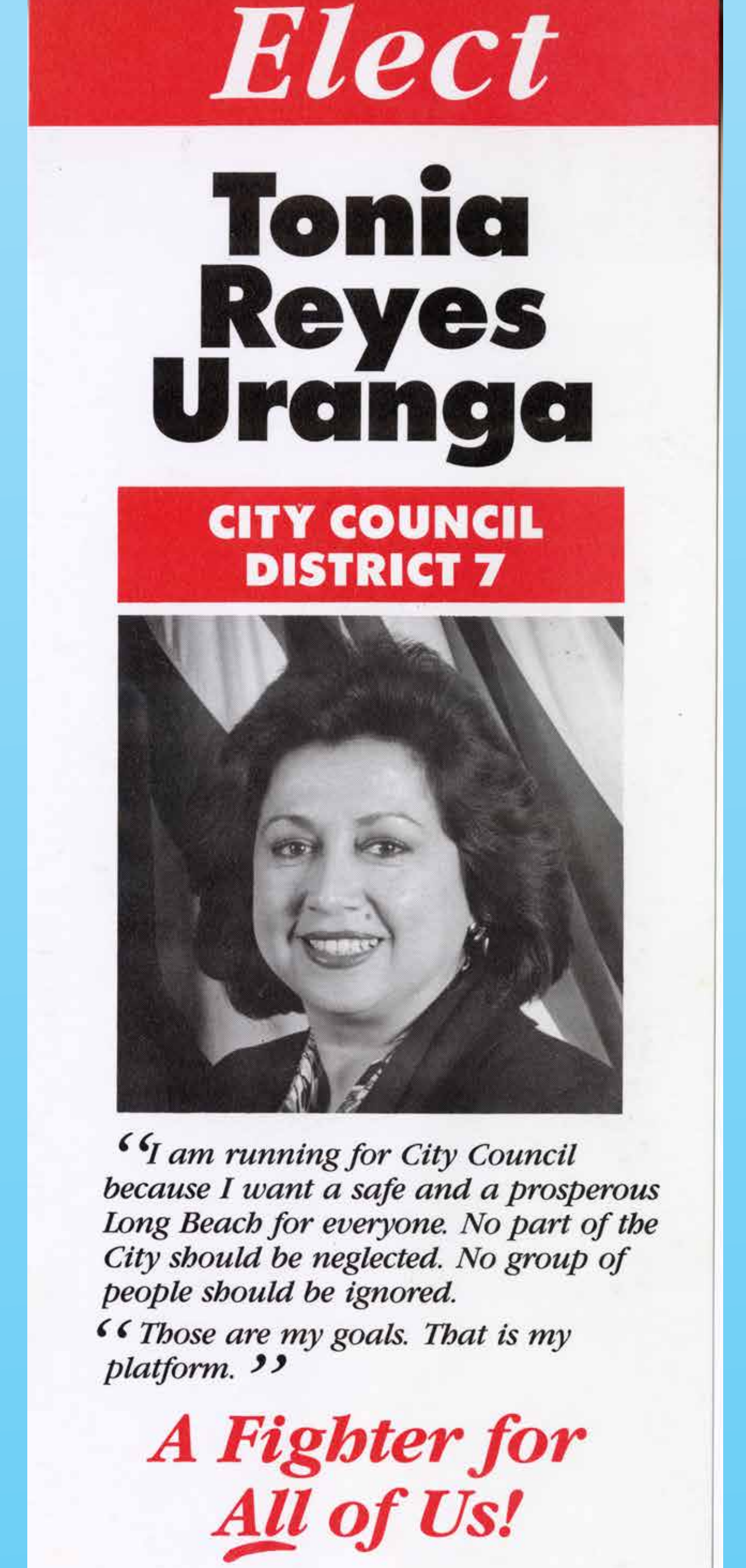
In the nineties, political organizations such as LBACI, the Long Beach Chicano Political Caucus, the Lambda Democratic Club, and Long Beach Young Democrats (LBYP) served as training grounds for yet to be elected candidates. Al Austin, one of the founders of the LBYP, along with high level political staffers and young community organizers helped get candidates who supported feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial equality into elected positions. Local organizations empowered communities and led to the election of more underrepresented officials.



Long Beach City Council District Map and Elected Officers, circa 1975-1978

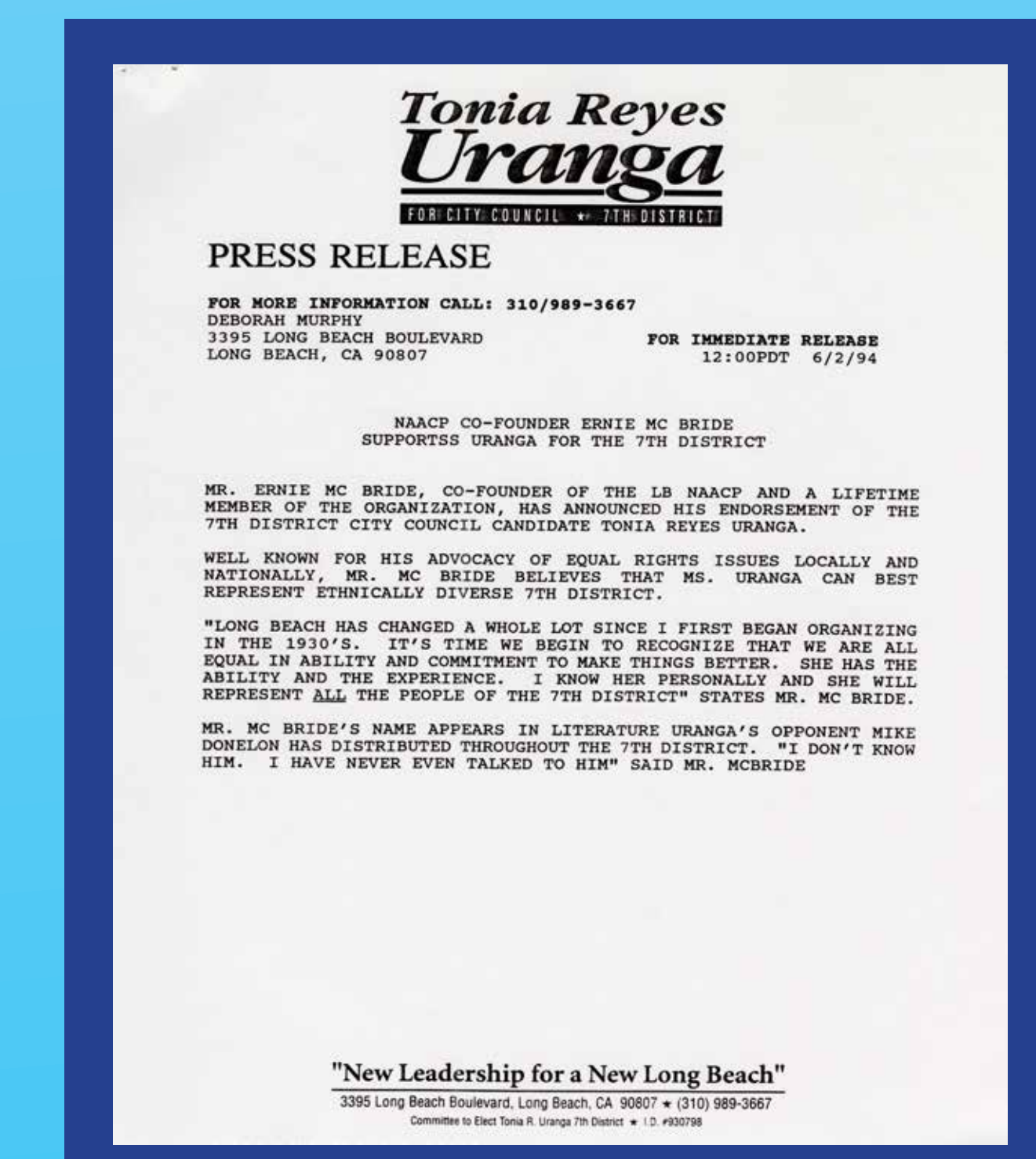


Campaign literature for political powerhouse, Councilwoman D6 (1992-2000) Doris Topsy-Elvord, circa 1992



Campaign literature for Councilwoman D7 (2002-2010) Tonia Reyes Uranga declaring her platform that "No part of the City should be neglected. No group of people should be ignored." 1994

Organizations like Asian Pacific Outreach, Cambodian Association of America, Khmer Girls in Action, and The Hmong Association of Long Beach emerged in response to the increase of Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong refugees. These organizations provided services the city could not, like family reunification, counseling, youth services, and English courses to help with acculturation and support for the new populations. The support system that these organizations provided to various Asian communities highlights the importance of multiethnic-serving organizations.



Tonia Reyes Uranga for City Council D7 Press Release announcing NAACP Co-founder Ernie Mc Bride's support for Uranga, an important cross-cultural endorsement which helped her garner support from other communities of color, she lost the election by a small margin to Mike Donelon, 1994



United Cambodian Community of Long Beach Child Center class photo, UCC was an important cultural center which provided resources for Cambodians and other communities of color, 1991



Willa Nelson teaches English as a second language class for students at LBCC, circa 1980s



"Friends to Elect Sandy Blankenship for City Council 4th District," campaign event for Sandy Blankenship, the first Cambodian American woman to run for city council, 1996



Award ceremony from the Black Manager's Association, Councilwoman D6 (1992-2000) Doris Topsy-Elvord (second from far right) and past president of Sister Cities of Long Beach, Inc., Phyllis Venable (far left), circa 1990s

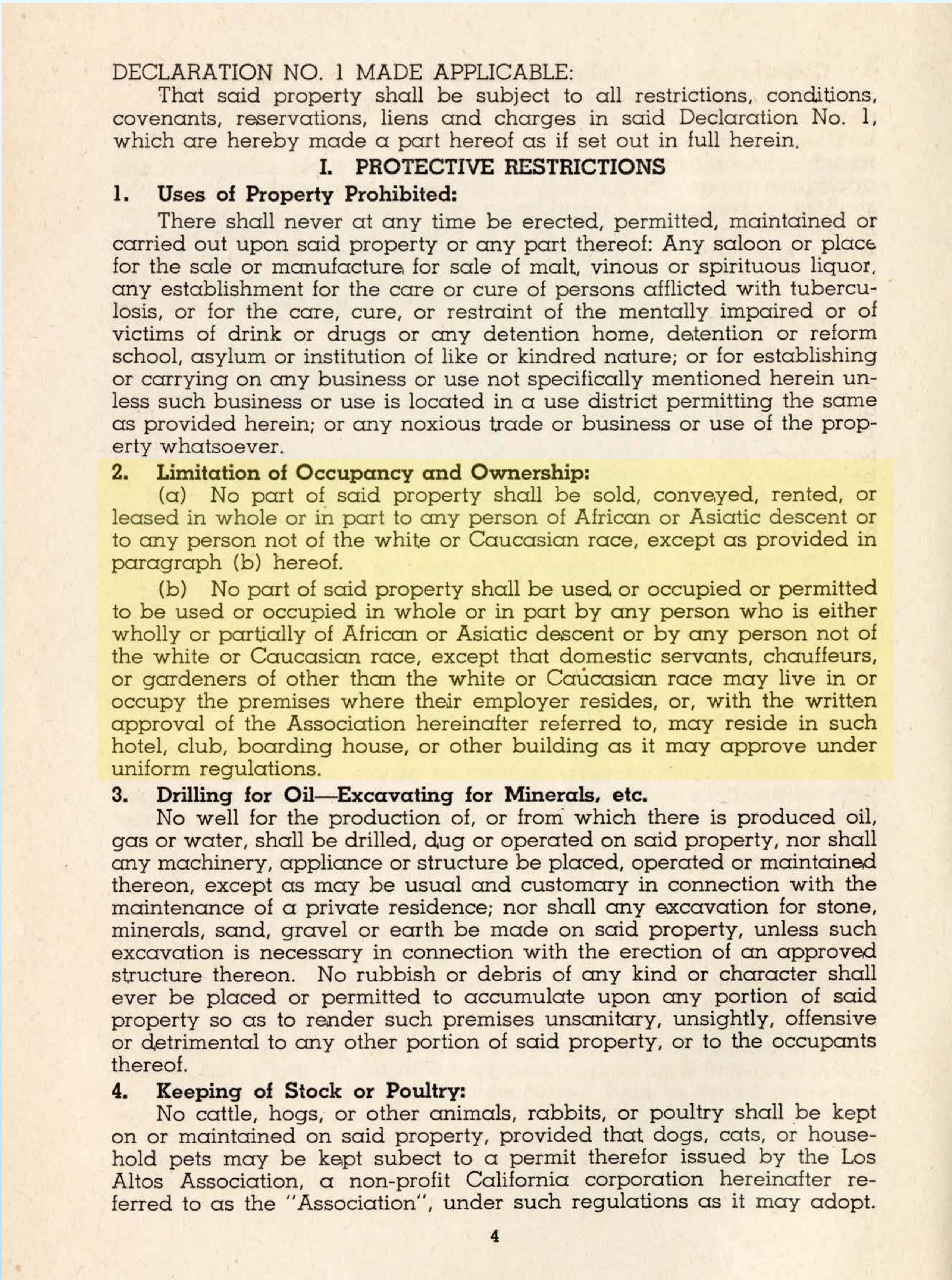




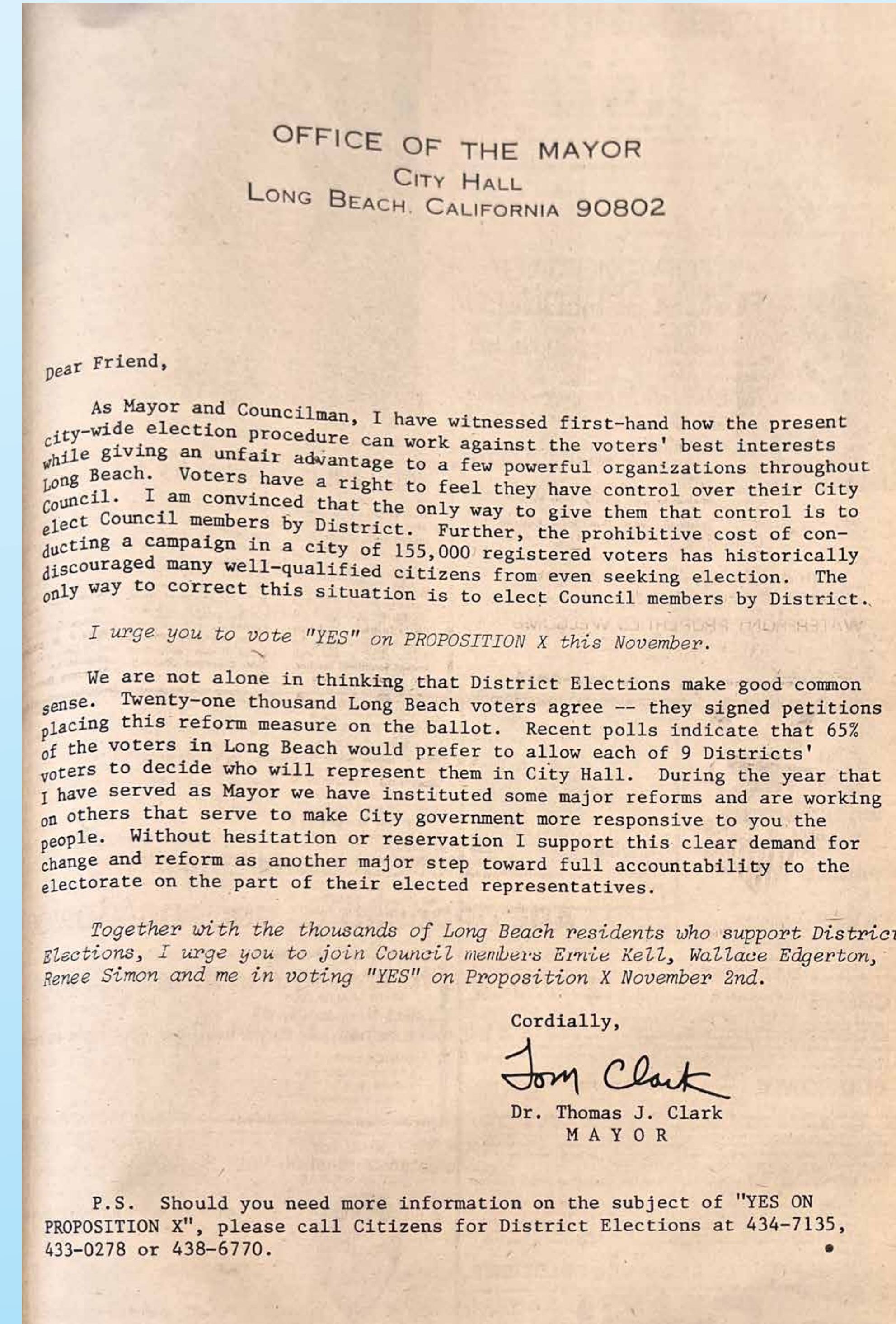
Challenging and Changing the Law

As the racial and ethnic composition of Long Beach changed in the latter half of the 20th century, there was pushback from the community over discriminatory practices against people of color. Yet, growing minorities and allies banded together and persevered. Redlining significantly limited areas in which certain groups could live.

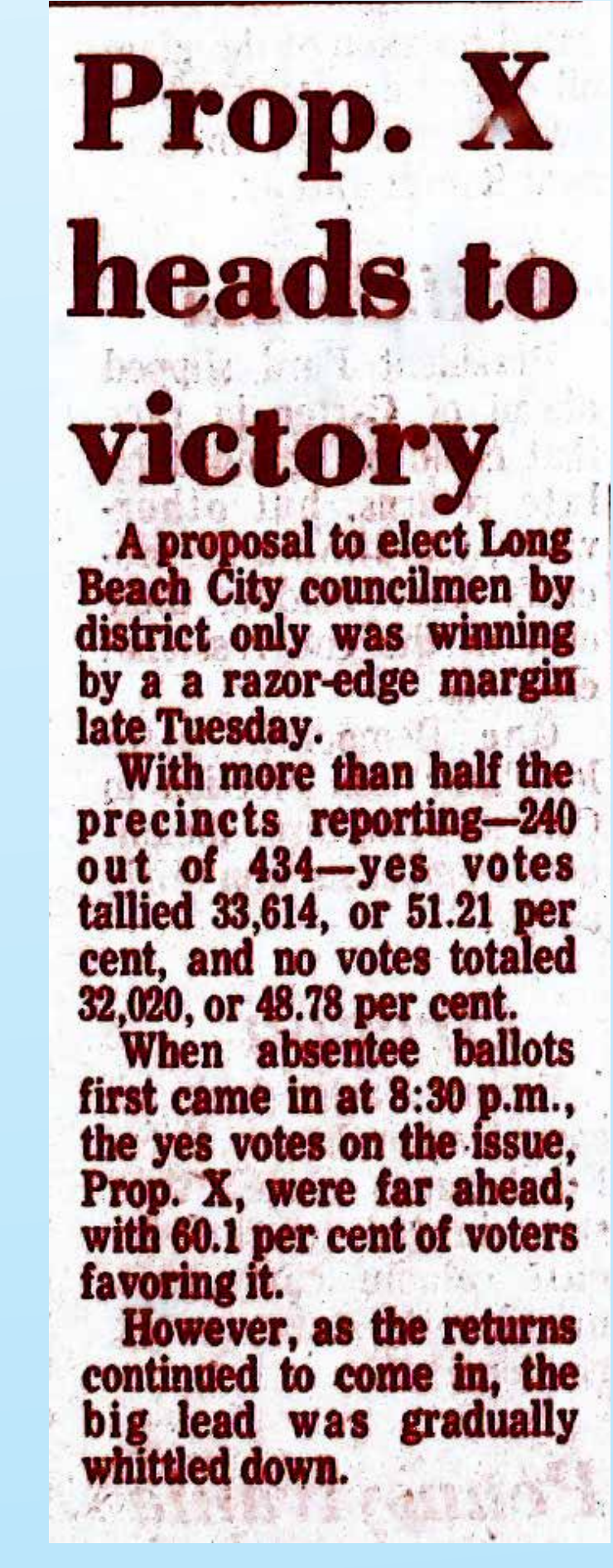
Every decade, the U.S. Census records the population and this data is used to redraw balanced legislative district boundaries. Redistricting is a controversial process fraught with difficulties. In 1976, after many attempts community groups such as Long Beach Area Citizens Involved (LBACI) spearheaded Proposition X, requiring elected officials to live in the council districts in which they served. Prominent figures such as Renee Simon, Tom Clark, Carmen O. Perez, and others, supported the effort. The passage of this seemingly unimportant proposition had a major impact on the city's future giving direct representation for individuals to elect their neighbors to the powerful city council. The new ordinance, a changing electorate, and redistricting enabled more political newcomers like Jenny Oropeza, the first Latinx on city council to get elected and advocate for their communities.



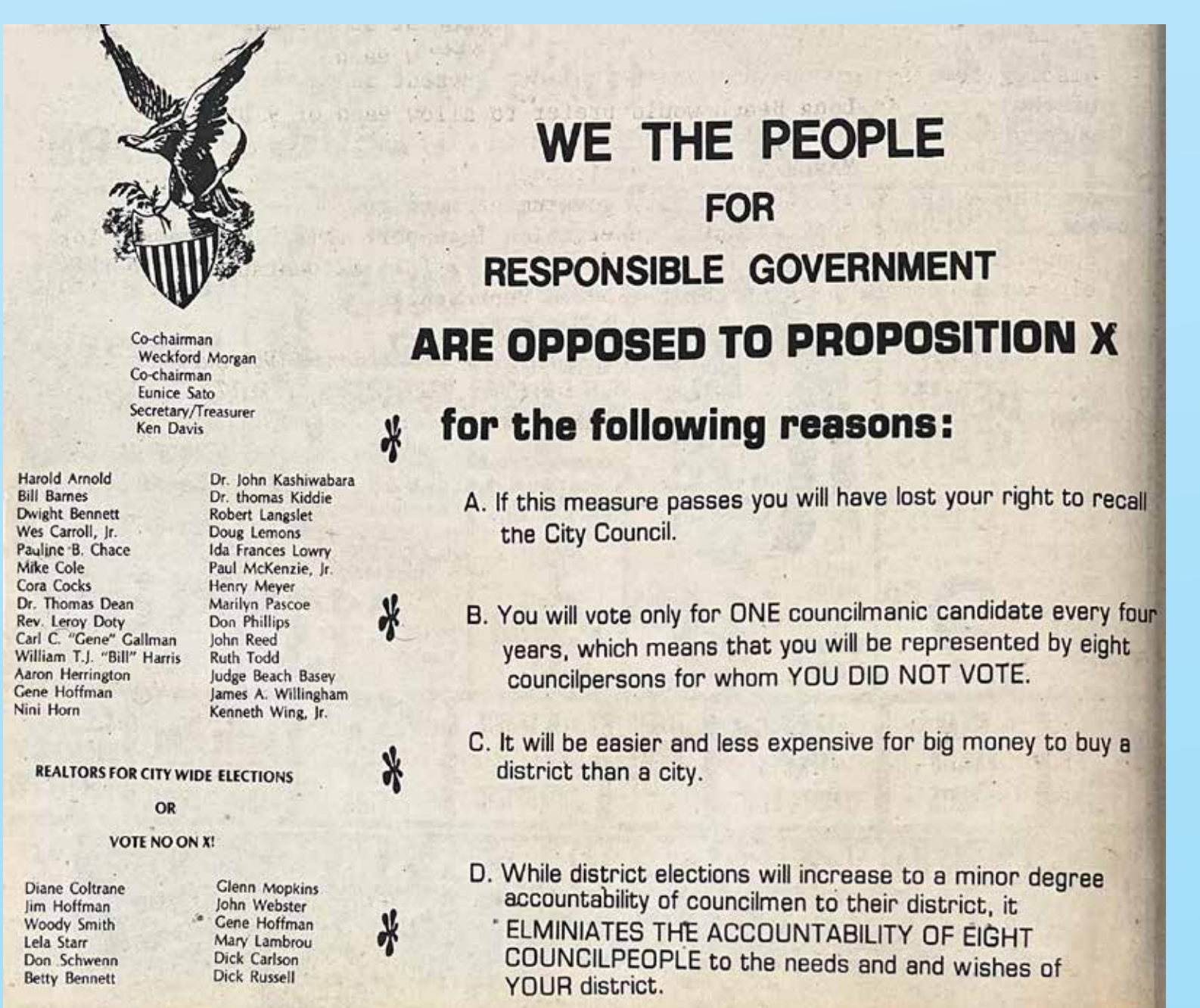
"Protective Restrictions" limiting owners and occupants of property based on race, this covenant covers the area in Bixby Knolls, circa 1948



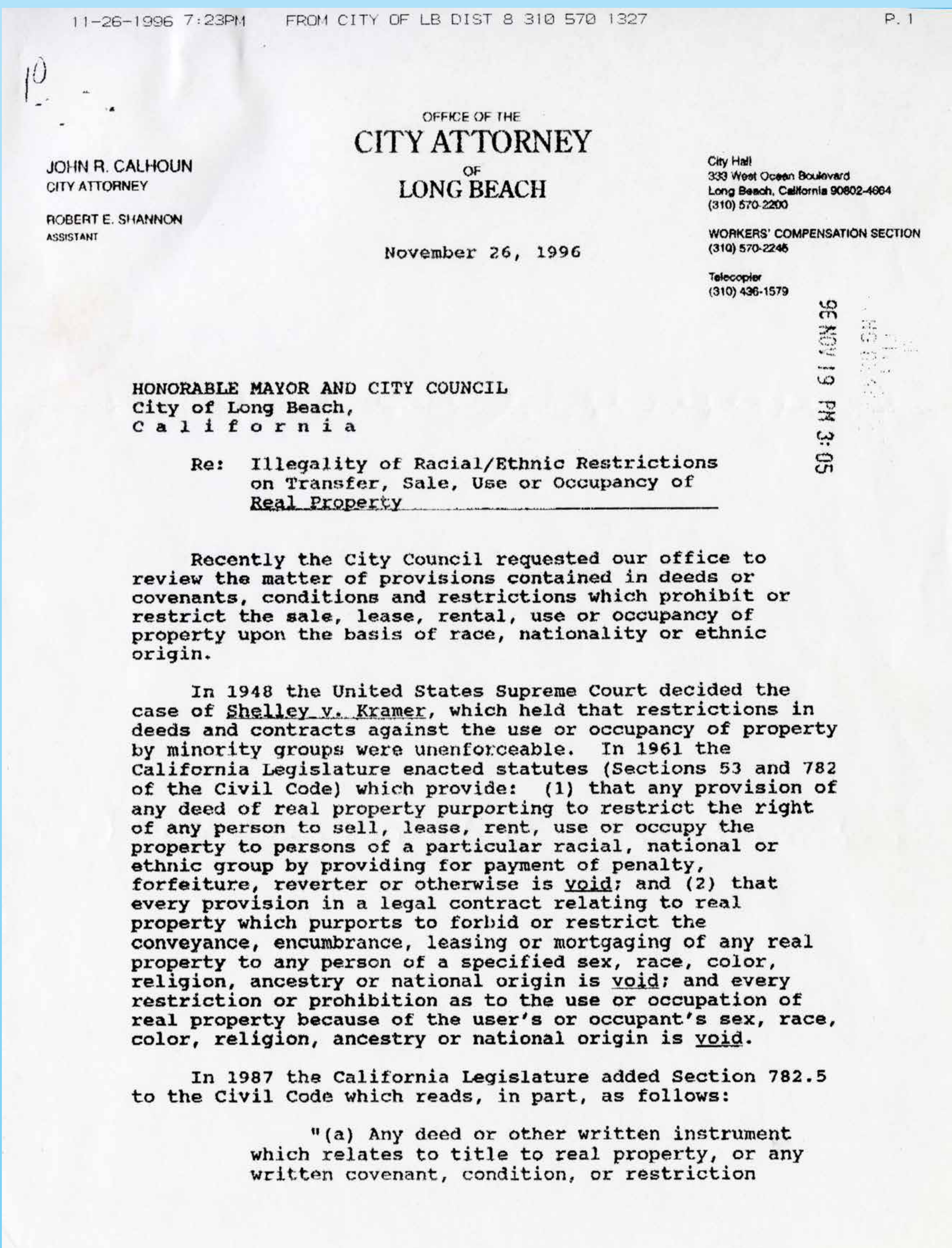
Full-Page Advertisement in the Marina News "Letter from Office of the Mayor," Tom Clark asking for constituents to vote YES on Proposition X, which would require councilmembers to live in the district that they serve, List of Councilmembers in favor: Ernie Kell, Wallace Edgerton, and Renee Simon, 1976



"Prop. X heads to victory," Proposition X required city councilmembers to live in the council district that they represented. Article details the passing of Prop. X by a slight margin of 51.21%, 1976.

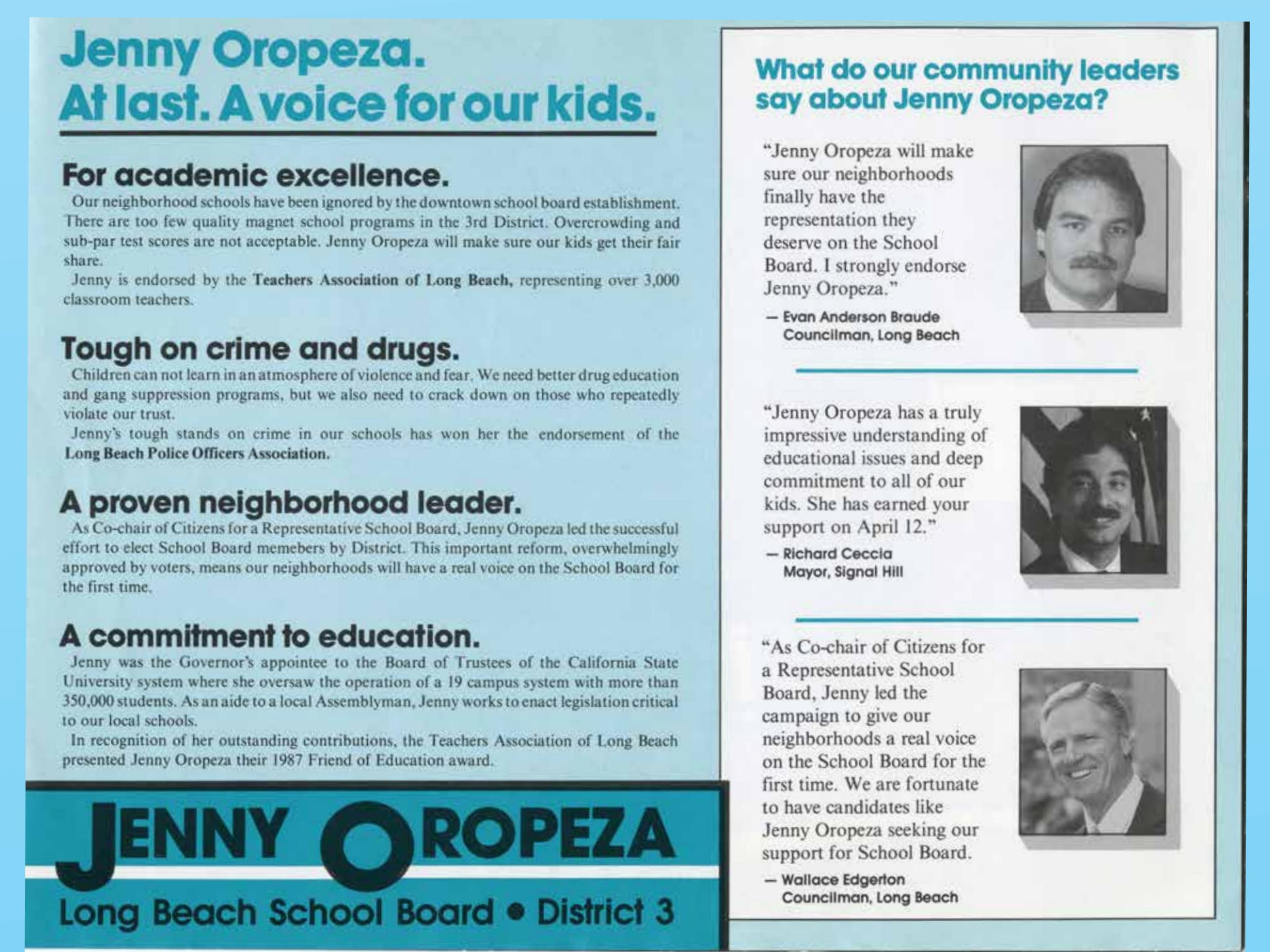


Half-Page Advertisement in the Marina News opposition of Proposition X, which would require councilmembers to live in the district that they serve, titled "We the People for Responsible Government are Opposed to Proposition X," List of opposition: Eunice Sato and others, 1976

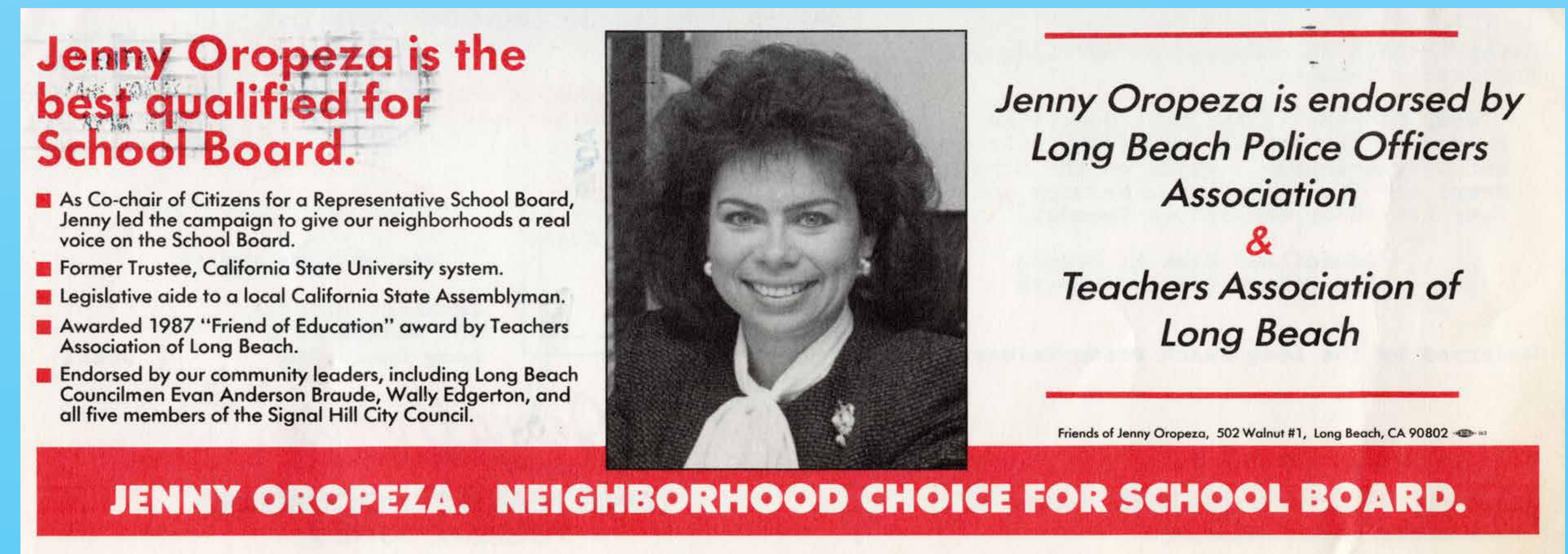


Faxed letter to Mayor and City Council enforcing 1948 decision which forbade racial/ethnic restrictions on occupancy, 1996

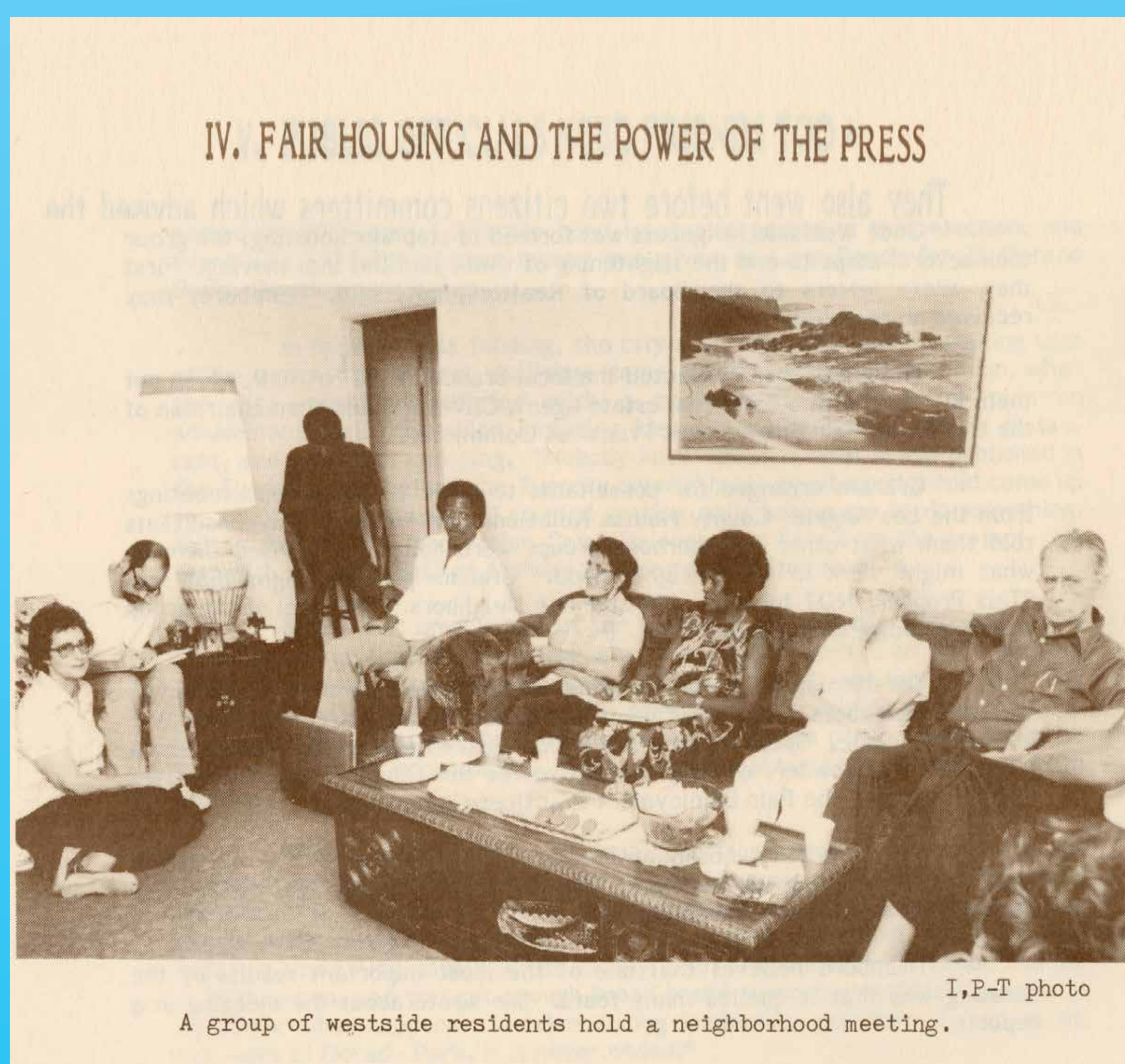
Another major change to Long Beach's politics began in 1978, when city council changed the mayoral election process. Initially, councilmembers selected the mayor, but there was a growing movement to vote for the next mayor. In 1986, Proposition R passed which codified city-wide elections for the mayor and amended the City Charter. In 1988, Ernie Kell became the first mayor elected by the public rather than city council. Beverly O'Neill followed in 1994, serving as the only woman and only three-term elected mayor of Long Beach, winning her last term as a write-in candidate.



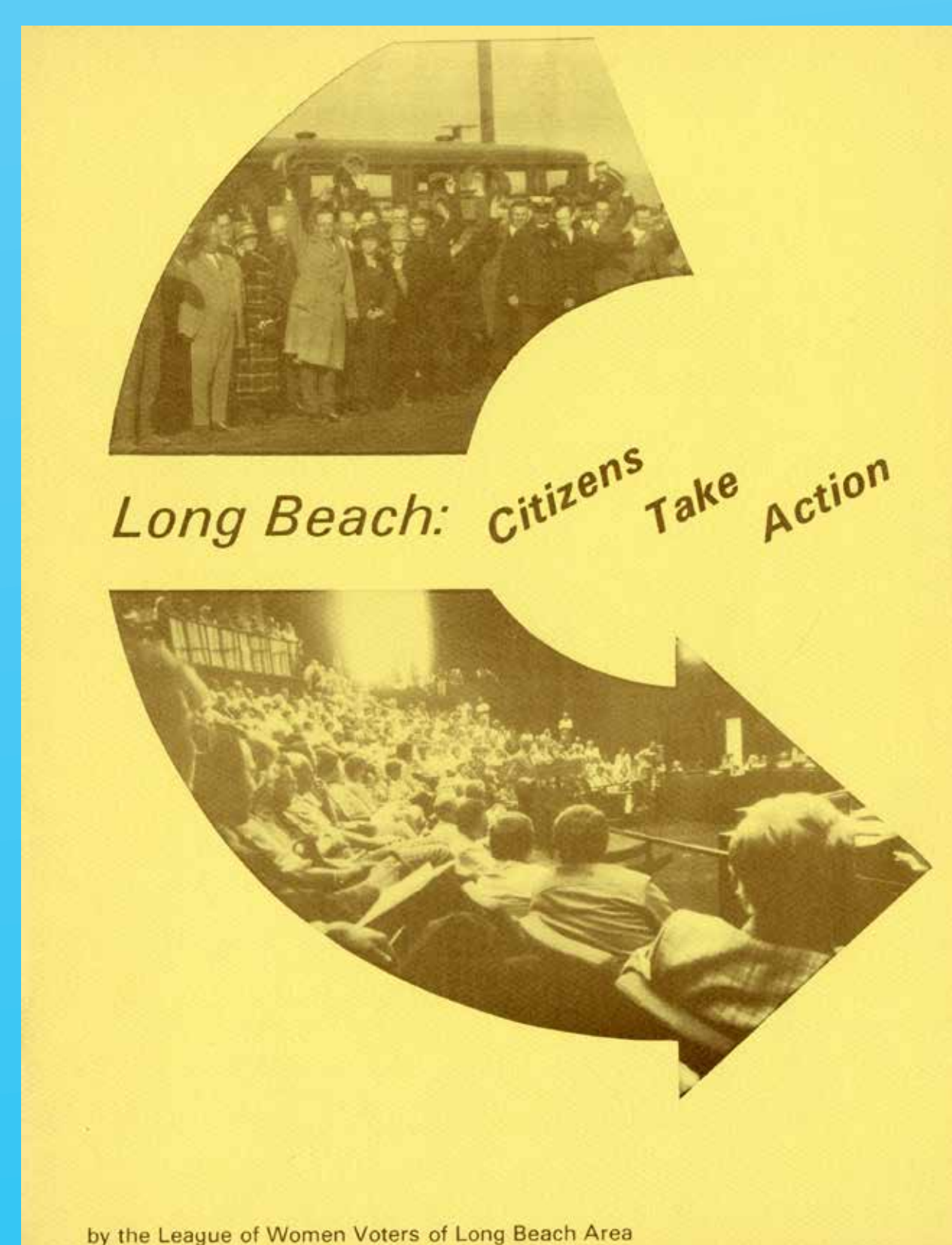
Campaign material for electing Jenny Oropeza to the Long Beach Unified School District Board, Endorsements from Councilman Evan A. Braude, Councilman Wallace Edgerton, and Mayor of Signal Hill, Richard Ceccia, circa 1987-1988.



Campaign material for electing Jenny Oropeza to the Long Beach Unified School District Board, Featuring endorsements from Long Beach Police Officers Association, Teachers Association of Long Beach, Councilmen Evan A. Braude and Wallace Edgerton, and all five members of the Signal Hill City Council, circa 1987-1988.



A group of westside residents hold a neighborhood meeting. I, P-T photo



Long Beach: Citizens Take Action pamphlet by the League of Women Voters of Long Beach Area. Photo of Westside residents holding meeting from I-P-T, 1981



Bixby Park band Shell No on Proposition 8 rally, Proposition 8 proposed amendment to the state constitution providing that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California" which would supersede a 2008 ruling allowing marriage equality, November 2008

In 2022, Measure LBC passed and amended the City Charter, which aligns city elections with the State's primary and general elections. This increased voter turnout while amplifying the voters of color.

The combination of population and legislative changes provided the path for increased representation of minority groups in city politics into the modern day. These hard-fought battles did not end when laws changed. Organizers continued to defend these changes and fight for the expansion of human rights.

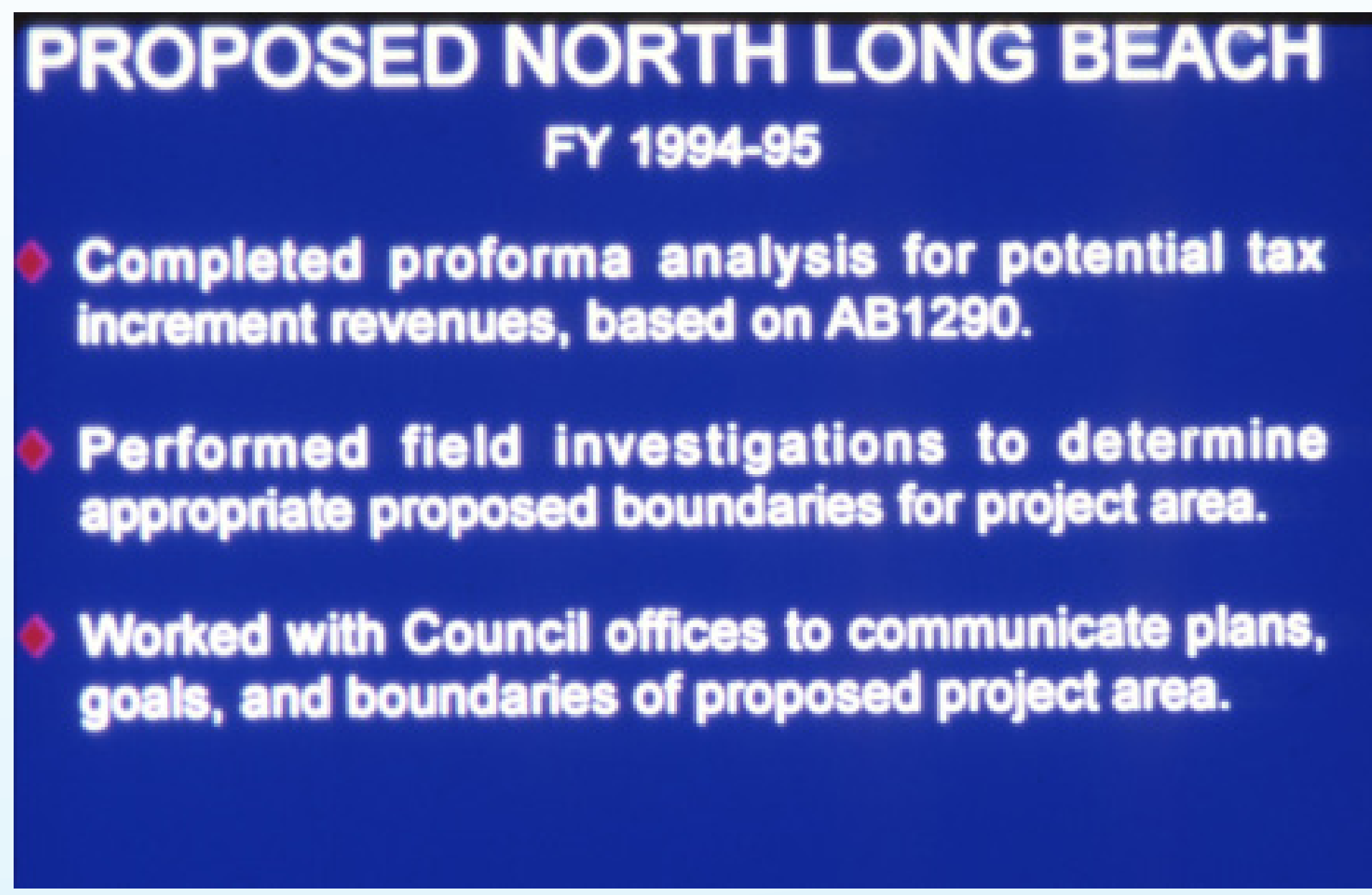


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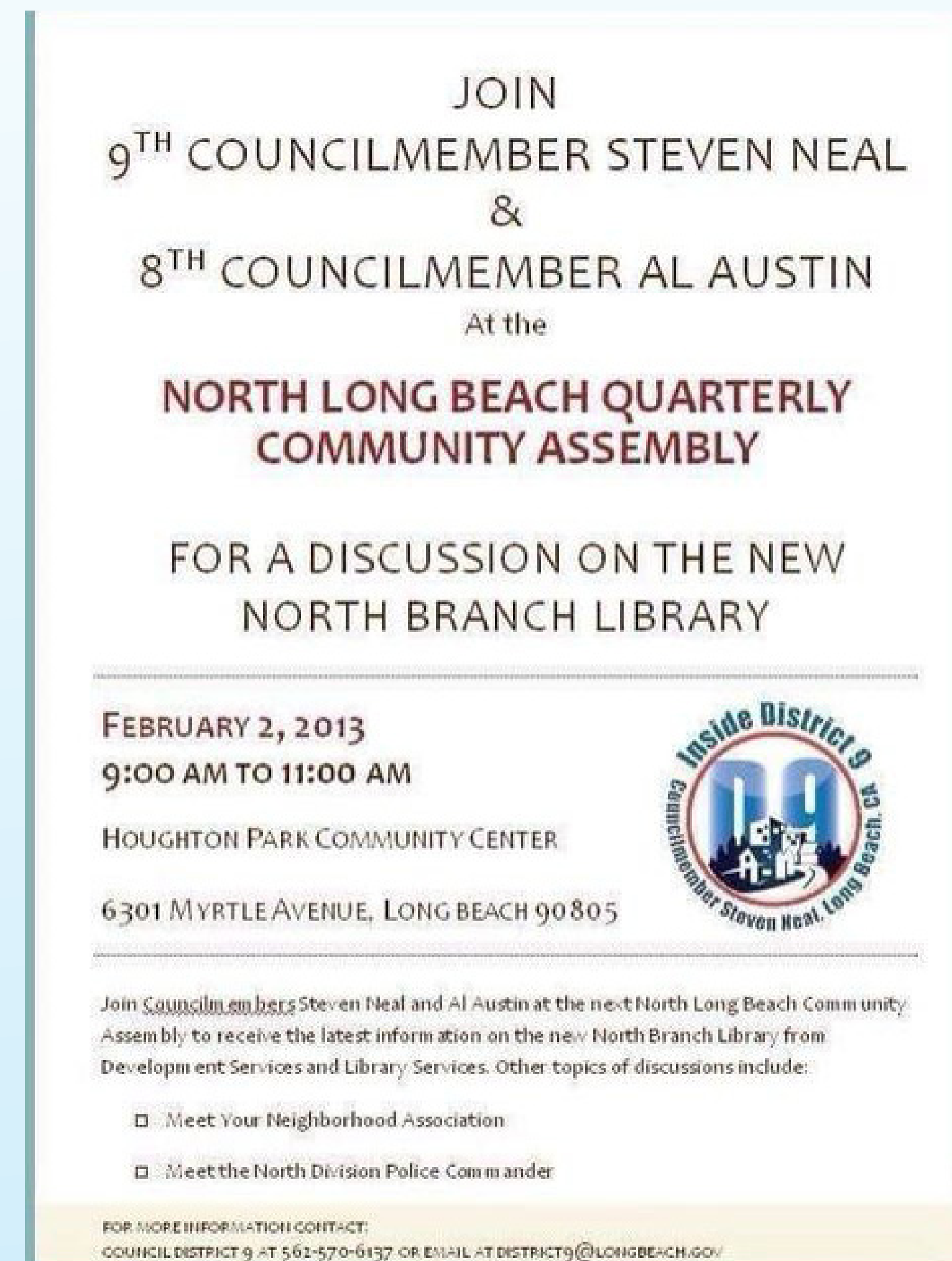
From the Margins: The Movement of Black Political Power



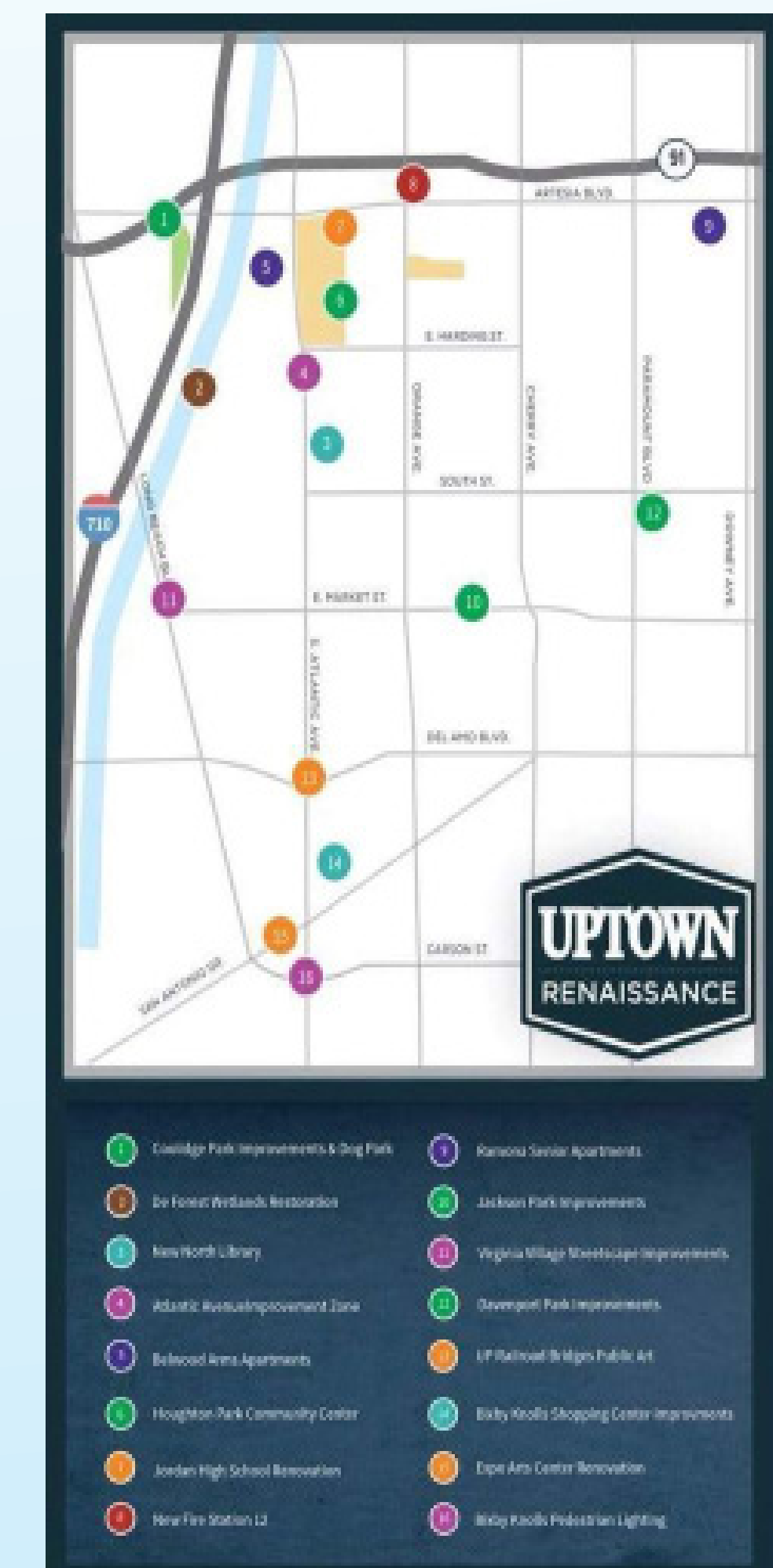
Redevelopment Agency slide, "Proposed North Long Beach FY 1994-95" detailing assessment of North Long Beach for potential redevelopment, 1994-1995

Long Beach doubled in size after annexing the area now known as North Long Beach in 1923, which contributed to the city's rise in significance in Southern California. In the last twenty years, North Long Beach has emerged as a center of political leadership and activism. Examining North Long Beach's transformation illuminates the importance of community empowerment and representation.

Although this area became part of the city in name, it was disconnected from the greater Long Beach culture, politics, and economy. Since the 1940s, inadequate funding and crumbling infrastructure plagued North Long Beach, however residents worked to enhance their neighborhood through organizations like the North Long Beach Improvement Association.



Flyer for Discussion at the North Branch Library with 9th Councilmember (2010-2014) Steve Neal and 8th Councilmember (2012-present) Al Austin, 2013



Map of North Long Beach with project sites for the Uptown Renaissance project; notable sites of importance are New North Library, Atlantic Avenue Improvement Zone, Coolidge Park Improvements & Dog Park. The project aimed to improve infrastructure and create community spaces, circa 2011-2013



A New Generation of Leaders
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an exceptional leader during the civil rights movement. We have come a long way in realizing King's dream. As we reflect back on Dr. King's teaching the promotion of Peace and Justice, one can take notice that today we have three African American elected officials representing the City of Long Beach.

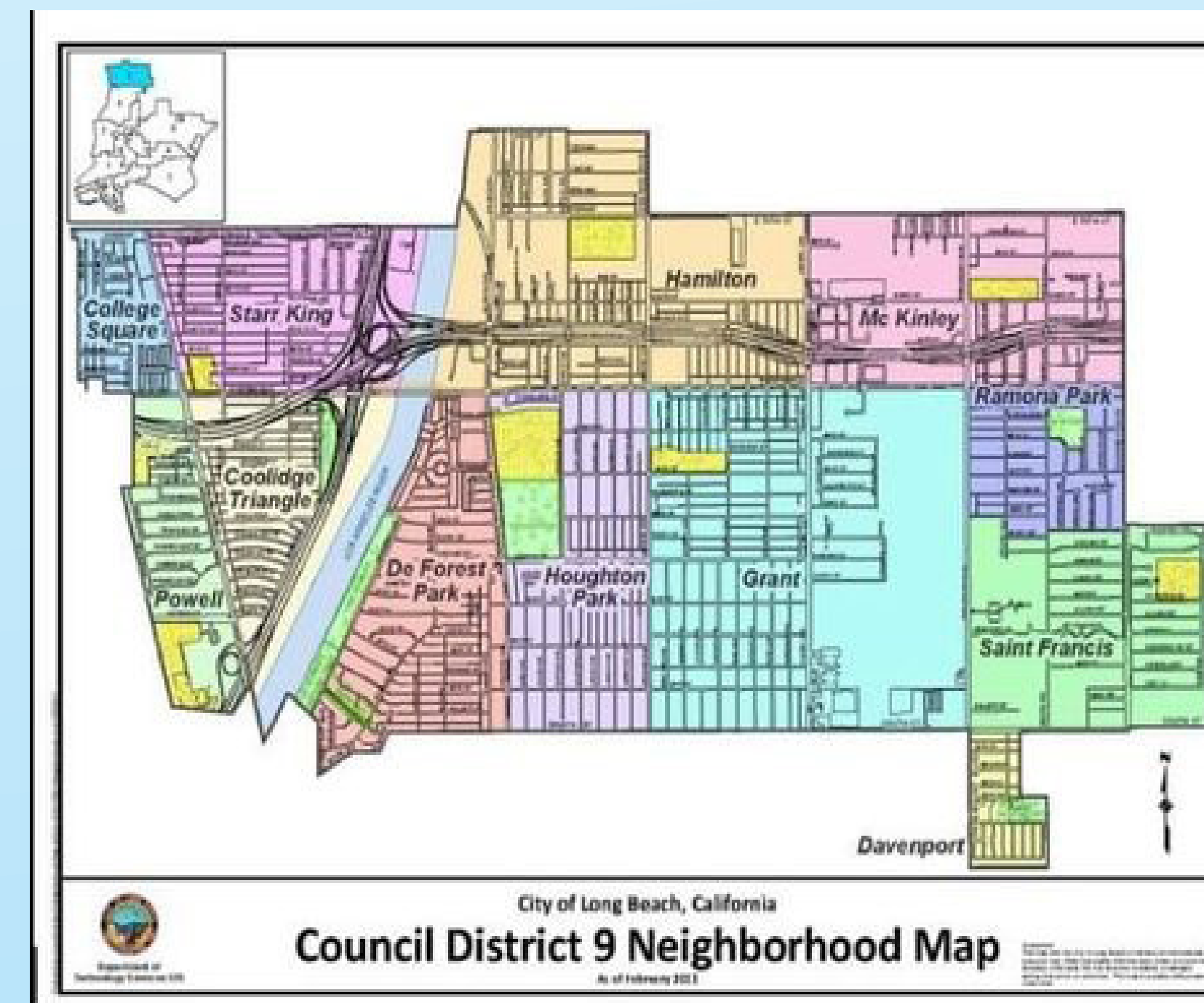
Postcard with D9 Councilman (2010-2014) Steve Neal, D6 Councilman (2007-2020) Dee Andrews, and D8 Councilman (2012-present) Al Austin a new generation of leaders in Long Beach, circa 2012-2013

North Long Beach's diverse population and working-class demographics provided strong support for Steve Neal, a religious leader, community activist, and labor organizer. He won the district 9 council seat in 2010, making history as the first African American councilmember elected outside of the Central Area. Similar to Neal, Al Austin used his union experience and connections to engage the community in his successful run for council district 8 in 2012, also making history as the first African American elected to that district.



(far left) Chief of Staff for Councilman Steve Neal, Rex Richardson, (middle) D9 Councilman (2010-2014) Steve Neal, and staffers, circa 2010-2014

Once in office, Neal appointed Rex Richardson as his chief of staff, and together they implemented the "Building a Better 9th District Community." This approach established communication networks through community newsletters and programs such as the district captains who work on neighborhood issues, creating a sense of empowerment among residents and encouraging active participation throughout district 9.



Council District 9 neighborhood map, City of Long Beach, California, circa 2011-2013

Neal and Richardson championed the renaissance of North Long Beach through the Uptown Planning Land Use and Neighborhood Strategy (UPLAN). UPLAN invested in public facilities such as the Michelle Obama Neighborhood Library, Jordan High School, Artesia Boulevard, and the construction of Fire Station 12. It also supported cultural events like the Uptown Jazz Festival and the Getty 25 at Houghton Park. In 2014, Neal declined to run again and Richardson launched a successful campaign for the seat. When Richardson became mayor in 2022, Dr. Joni Ricks-Oddie successfully ran for the district 9 seat.

"If you've never worked for the city before you have no idea how to navigate the system. How to get anything done. I was looking for young staff or people that were viable. We put together a plan to make that happen and built up our neighborhood associations. I think when I took over there were 6 neighborhood associations in District 9 and when I left there were 13. We organized the district using the neighborhood association model which was already there, and where there weren't neighborhood associations, we found leaders there to create that. That is a great leadership development tool. Our current councilmember, Joni Ricks-Oddie, comes out of that system as being the president of her neighborhood association, working very closely with the council office, getting appointed to a commission, and having some understanding of how the city works. [Leaders who do that] are much more prepared to come in from day 1."

-Steve Neal 2024



Flyer for the 3rd Annual Latin Jazz & Blues Festival at Houghton Park presented by Councilmember Steve Neal D9, 2014



Signage of Councilmember Steven Neal 9th District Field Office and the Center for Families and Youth, Houghton Park Community Center, and Future Generations Youth Center, circa 2010-2014

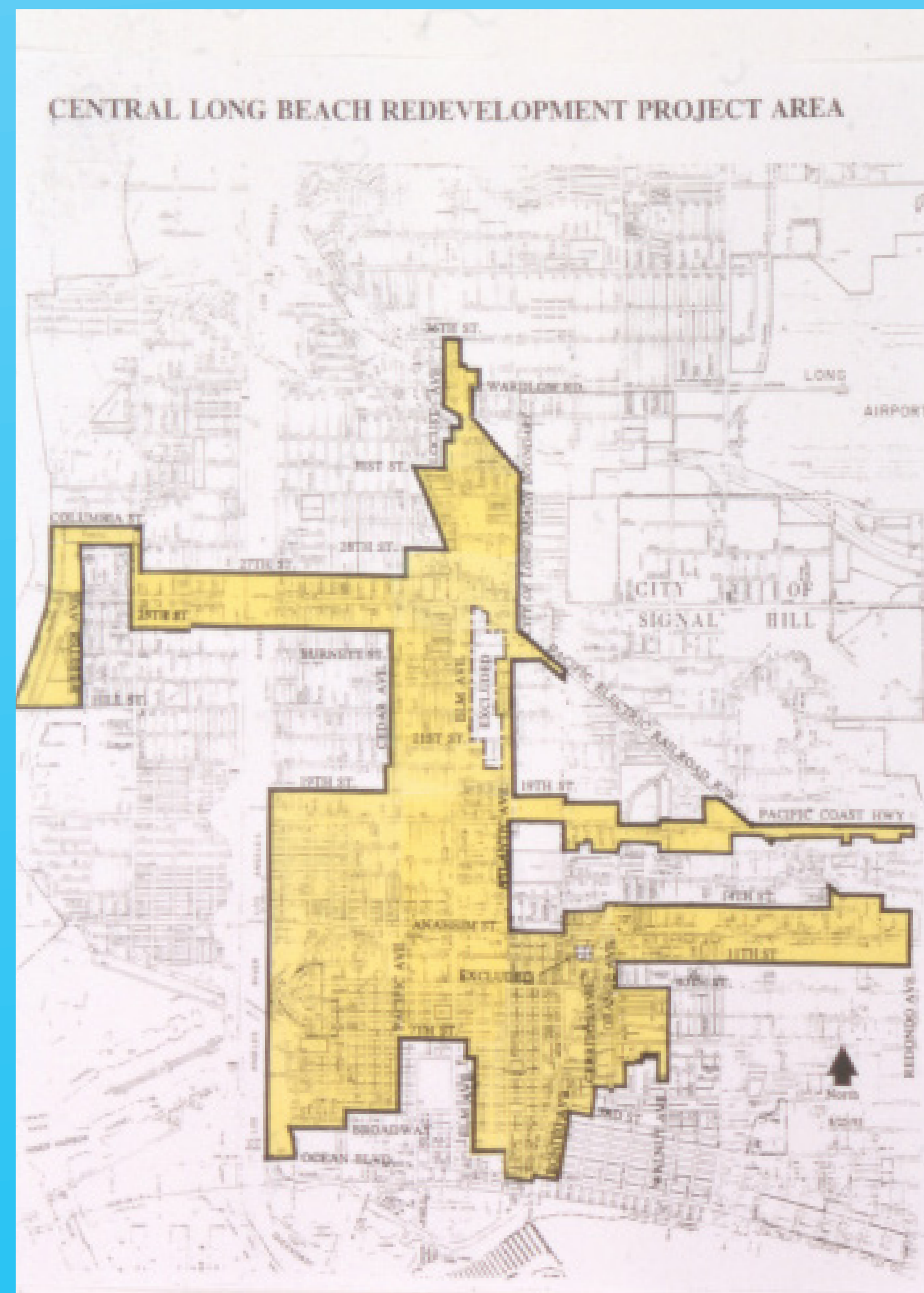
The continuous population growth in the north required the city to rebalance the nine council districts in 2020, adding sections of district 8 and more of district 9 into North Long Beach, which continued to increase its influence. The election of new leaders in North Long Beach marked a major turning point in city politics, with African American political representation expanding outside of the Central Area. This change, along with the investments of the Uptown Renaissance, shows how community empowerment and local elections can make major transformations to previously ignored areas.



From left to right: D5 Councilwoman (2022-present) D5 Megan Kerr, Mayor (2022-present) Rex Richardson, Councilwoman (2020-present) D6 Suely Saro at Mayor's Fund for Education Event, 2024



Sixth District Renaissance Community Newsletter Article details improvements made to Central Long Beach and D6 Councilwoman (1992-2000) Topsy-Elvord's accomplishments thus far, 1996



Central Long Beach Redevelopment Project Area Map of Central Long Beach, 1994

Central Long Beach, The Historic Black Community

Historically, the Central Area of Long Beach was the cultural and political center for the African American community. The 1970 election marked a turning point in the city's political history, with the election of Jim Wilson, the first African American councilmember. The sole council seat held by a person of color was limited to the Central Area (district 6) until the 1975 election of Eunice Sato from district 7. In the 1990s, more people of color began winning council seats in other parts of the city. In 2020, Suely Saro defeated incumbent, Councilman Dee Andrews for the 6th district seat. In 2010, African Americans began representing North Long Beach. The Central Area is currently home to African American, South East Asian, and Latinx populations.

Council District 6 Electoral History

1966-1970	Emmet M. Sullivan
1970-1986	James Howard Wilson
1986-1992	Clarence Smith
1992-2000	Doris Topsy-Elvord
2000-2006	Laura Richardson (Batts)
2007-2020	Dee Andrews
2020-present	Suely Saro



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Paving the Way



Rex Richardson
First African American Mayor
First Mayor Elected from North Long Beach

"[In] Two years Long Beach went from one district to three districts represented by African Americans. Steve Neal really represented that moment. I think even when you think about everything happening here, first Cambodian, that door was kind of opened by Steve opening up the playbook for African Americans citywide. That opened up the opportunity there. Robert Garcia was also a trailblazer, first Latino mayor, and he opened up the door for Lena Gonzalez. The way that Steve opened the door for me, Al Austin, Uduak Ntuk. This was a moment of empowerment."
 -Mayor Rex Richardson 2024

Rex Richardson served as A.S.I. President at CSUDH, a union organizer, chief of staff to Councilmember Neal, city councilmember from 9th district in 2014 (to 2022) before running for mayor. He is the youngest councilmember and vice mayor in the city's history. Richardson was elected mayor in 2022, his term ends in 2026. His election as the 29th mayor is historic as the first African American, and the first mayor who lives in North Long Beach. As of 2024, he is a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Community Development and Housing Committee.



Dee Andrews
Councilman

"I still to this day do not claim myself as being a politician. I got into that because I love people, and if you noticed when I finished council seat I never wanted to go to State Senate and all of that. That was it. I had the longest term as a councilperson or anyone, I got thirteen years and you were supposed to only get eight."
 -Dee Andrews 2024

A former NFL player with the Dallas Cowboys, Long Beach Polytechnic and Wilson High School teacher, Dee Andrews was elected to the city council representing the 6th district in 2007 (to 2020). As of 2024, Andrews works as a substitute teacher for LBUSD and remains active in the community.



Robert Garcia
First Latinx Mayor
First LGBTQ+ Mayor

"People haven't always believed that we could play in the big leagues. People for a long time have said 'Oh, we're too close to L.A. to do anything big.' You'll hear less of that today than you would five or 10 years ago."

"The biggest piece was being gay. Just coming out and being who I am, there was just no way I couldn't [not] change my registration."
 -Robert Garcia 2015 [on changing his party registration to Democrat from Republican]

A former A.S.I., President of CSULB, information officer at Long Beach City college, and faculty at USC and LBCC. Elected to city council representing the 1st district in 2009 (to 2014), vice mayor in 2012 (to 2014), mayor in 2014 (to 2018). Garcia is the youngest mayor in Long Beach history. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2022 (to present).



Steven Neal
First African American
District 9 Councilman

"You know before I ran for office up here in the north, all the Black councilmembers had come out of Central Long Beach, the sixth district. There have been six councilmembers elected out of there in forty years. Well since my election in 2010, the Black councilmembers are coming from up here."
 -Steve Neal 2024

A former Director of Labor, Steve Neal was the first African American elected from the 9th district and the first African American outside of the 6th district to serve on the city council in 2010 (to 2014). As of 2024, he is a pastor of LIFE Gospel Ministries, co-founder of the Economic Policy Impact Center, a nonprofit working to advance economic opportunity for working families, Executive Director of the Long Beach Collective Association, and Harbor Commissioner.



Al Austin II
First African American
District 8 Councilman

"In the mid-nineties, we developed some strategies and plans to run [African American] people in different areas of the city. From those early conversations, we need to be looking at North Long Beach. We need to be looking at the West Side. We need to be looking at other areas. And it wasn't just to obviously to create, you know, African American, Black political power, but it was also to advance the issues that were not only unique to our community, but so many other communities of color."
 -Al Austin II 2024

A former labor organizer at McDonnell Douglas and a field representative, Al Austin II was the first African American elected from the 8th district to serve on the city council in 2012 (to 2024). He ran unsuccessfully for city council in the 6th district in 2007 and for the State Assembly in 2022. Austin co-founded Long Beach Young Democrats.



Roberto Uranga
Councilman

"I was able to win that because I was able to show that, I could cross the aisle, that I could engage with other communities. My wife and I have very good relations with the African American community, and the LGBT community. If you want to make change, be a part of that change. And if you want somebody to look like you, you gotta be you."
 -Roberto Uranga 2024

A former recruitment officer for the city's civil service office, administrative officer for the Department of Health and Human Services, and administrator for CSULB. Elected to city council in the 7th district in 2014 (to present).



Mary Zendejas
First Latinx Wheelchair User
Councilwoman

"As a Polio survivor and a first-generation college graduate, I owe my life to this country. Therefore, I have dedicated myself to serving my community for the past 30 years. When I was elected in 2019, I made history by becoming the first Latina wheelchair user elected to office in the nation."
 -Mary Zendejas 2022

A former board member of the Disabled Resource Center, Long Beach Transit, For the Child, and Ms. Wheelchair America, Zendejas was elected to city council representing the 1st district in 2019 (to present). She was the first Latinx wheelchair user elected to the city council.

Raising of the first disability pride flag at city hall in 2024. Top row: Mayor Richardson, Councilwoman D5 Kerr, Councilwoman D9 Ricks-Oddie. Bottom row: Councilwoman D1 Zendejas and several constituents.



Dr. Suely Saro
First Cambodian
Councilmember

"Cambodia Town area -- I've seen it change over time as a young girl to an adult. It was a big refugee community and everyone galvanized to be here because that was where all of the restaurants, the supermarkets, and people live that were family members. Deciding to run against an incumbent, wasn't an easy decision, I met with my husband my, to some extent my family, because it was going to take a toll on all of us."

"I've done a lot to lift up our buddhist community, who, is very present here but always has been invisible. As a Buddhist, I do want to make sure that they're represented in the city too. We have, over twelve temples in Long Beach."
 -Dr. Suely Saro 2024

A former Executive Director of Khmer Girls in Action, labor organizer, and Manager of Stakeholder Relations at AES Clean Energy. Dr. Suely Saro became the first Cambodian American elected to city council representing the 6th district in 2020 (to present).





Paving the Way



Ruth Bach
First Woman
Councilwoman

"More and more women are participating in government at a high level. Long Beach is ready for it. A woman council member should not be considered an oddity. I am hoping the time has come when membership is determined by qualification rather than sex."
 -Ruth Bach 1954

A former president of the University Women's Study Club and vice president of the League of Women voters, Ruth Bach was the first woman elected to city council representing the fifth district in 1954 (to 1955). She passed away before her term ended. 1905-1955



James Howard Wilson
First African American
Councilmember

"Wilson is a torchbearer for the current political scene...Wilson set in motion initiatives that reflected the politics of the poor, working class residents of his district."
 -Lawrence Fortenberry 2024

A former city employee and management consultant, Jim Wilson organized a multi-racial/ethnic coalition and won the 6th district seat on the city council in a special election in April 1970 (to 1986). 1928-1986



Renee Simon
First Jewish Councilmember

"1975, was the First International Women's year and the conference was in Mexico City. Of my colleagues, I was the only woman, and they said, 'Renee you can go and represent Long Beach.' I said I'd be glad to do that. One of the outcomes was to develop a status of women commission in cities all over to be concerned with salaries, positions, or equal opportunity. And I said oh, that's a snap, I'll do that. Hahaha. Nobody on the council wanted to support me. I thought it would be so easy. It was ugly, really ugly."
 -Renee Simon 2018

A Stanford educated chemist, librarian, and author, Renee Simon, was elected to city council representing the 3rd district in 1972 (to 1978). She was active with League of Women Voters, the Fair Housing Foundation, Friends of the LB Public Library, Women Shelter, Arts Council for Long Beach, Long Beach Navy Memorial Heritage Association, and Historical Society of Long Beach. She refused to bow to local power brokers. Simon worked to professionalize the city council requesting detailed budgets, and increasing staff support for the council.



Eunice Sato
First Asian Councilmember,
First Woman Mayor

"When I ran I didn't promise anything to the people...to the voters of the seventh district. I promised integrity that's all I promised and I figure I delivered that."
 -Eunice Sato 2013

A former teacher, Eunice Sato was the first Asian American elected to the city council representing the 7th district in 1975 (to 1986) and selected to serve as mayor (1980-1982). She was the first woman to serve as mayor, the first Asian American and first Japanese American woman to serve as mayor of a major U.S. city. 1921-2021

At the first national conference of Cambodian groups. Left to right: General Pok Sam An, Councilwoman D7 Sato, Prince Sisowath Sirirath of Cambodia



Jenny Oropeza,
First Latinx Councilmember

"Everybody's going to be watching and evaluating me, especially in the early months. I know there are people who will be thinking not that I'm well-educated, articulate or intelligent, but [only] that I'm Hispanic."
 -Jenny Oropeza 1994

Jenny Oropeza was the first Latinx A.S. President at CSULB, LBUSD Board Member in 1988 (to 1994) and district 1 city councilmember in 1994 (to 2000). She went on to serve in the State Assembly and Senate. 1957-2010



Doris Topsy-Elvord
First African American Councilwoman

"Our city was basically a town that for generations ignored the rights of anyone that was not white males. I don't know of any other area of the world, the size of our city, that has as much cultural diversity as we have. This phenomenon is a great opportunity, or it could be a disastrous one. That, my friends, is up to all of us."
 -Doris Topsy-Elvord 1996

A former probation officer, Doris Topsy-Elvord was the first African American woman elected to the city council in 1992 (to 2000) and first African American person to serve on the harbor commission in 2003. 1931-2021

Laura Richardson (right of Topsy-Elvord) was elected to serve as councilmember following Topsy-Elvord in 2000 (to 2006), California Assembly D55 (2006-2007), U.S. House of Representatives D37 (2007-2013)



Beverly O'Neill
First Woman Elected Mayor

"When you are working in a community you can't make a decision on your own. You have to have people involved with it. You have to have people working with you on it. You have to make sure that the community and that the immediate community that it affects works on it. So, all of these things are in public service and those of you that have ever been elected to anything...that's the first thing that if you don't realize that...you're not going to last."
 -Beverly O'Neill 2013

A former President of Long Beach City College, Beverly O'Neill was elected mayor in 1994 (to 2006) and the only three-term mayor.

O'Neill presenting a proclamation to Sandy (San Arun) Blankenship, the first Cambodian woman to run for city council (1996) and executive director of the Cambodian Business Association, 1993



Dan Baker
First LGBTQ+ Councilmember

An attorney and former U.S. Customs Service officer, Dan Baker was the first LGBTQ+ identified person elected to city council representing the 2nd district in 1999 (to 2006). He was a board member Long Beach Area Citizens Involved, chair of Chief's Gay and Lesbian Advisory Group, and chair of the Citizen Police Complaint Commission.



Tonia Reyes Uranga
Councilwoman

"Long Beach Area Citizens Involved...I met so many wonderful people that were progressive and insightful and bold. A lot of them were seniors. I learned so much. They took me under their wing. There were just so many of them -- Naida Tushnet. I was able to see how they worked in the political world and we worked on campaigns for people who we believed in, that stood for what we believed in and that's how I got involved."
 -Tonia Reyes Uranga 2024

A former League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) president and city employee, Tonia Reyes Uranga first ran for the 7th district in city council in 1994, losing by a tight margin in a recount. She was elected to the 7th district seat in 2002 (to 2010). As of 2024, Reyes Uranga serves as a board member of Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE).



Gerrie Schipske
First Lesbian Councilwoman

"This is where city government started to change in Long Beach, he [John Dever] recruited me. They recruited Sherry Suttles, she was an African American woman. He brought us in and put us in charge of really important projects. That was different, they never had women other than the secretaries in the city manager's office."
 -Gerrie Schipske 2024

Gerrie Schipske is a registered Nurse Practitioner, author, healthcare attorney, member of U.S. Supreme Court bar, retired faculty member, and active grandmother. Elected to the city council representing the 5th district in 2006 (to 2014) and was the first known lesbian councilmember. She has run unsuccessfully for Congress, Mayor in 2014, city council's 4th district in 2024, WRD in 2022, and City Attorney in 2022.

