

# Doug Lovell receives the City Manager Leadership Award for January

Acting City Manager Tammy Letourneau presented Maintenance Superintendent Doug Lovell with the City Manager Leadership Award at the monthly Meet and Greet event on Thursday Jan. 24.

“Doug is a hard worker and highly respected by all who work with him,” Letourneau said. “He always puts the interests and safety of Costa Mesa employees and residents above himself. We are so fortunate to have him on our team.”

Lovell joined the Costa Mesa team in 2003 as the Lead Maintenance Technician in the Facilities Section of the Public Services Department. He was quickly promoted to Maintenance Supervisor in 2007 where he began managing large projects, organizing building modifications and running the Facilities Sections daily operations.

In 2015, Lovell was promoted to Maintenance Superintendent, where he has continued to grow and provide the City with a high level of service.

Lovell works tirelessly to keep projects, contractors and staff on schedule and in line. Some of his recent accomplishments include: the emergency generator installation project and the replacement of the cooling towers at City Hall. He is currently working on are the 2nd floor remodel, the 5th floor remodel, the new community room, resurfacing and fencing project, the elevator modernization project while preparing the Facilities Section’s budget, building modifications and Capital Improvement Project requests.

And recently, he willingly worked days and nights through the holiday closure, moving projects forward while limiting the

impact of the construction on Costa Mesa residents and staff.

Prior to joining the city, Lovell was the Chief Operating Engineer at the Westin South Coast Plaza.

In addition to honoring Lovell, Letourneau welcomed several newly hired employees and congratulated several who received promotions.

The new hires include Kevin Do, a new Recreation Leader III in the Parks & Community Services Department.

Also newly hired are David Brito and Jorge Patino, two new Maintenance Assistants working in the Public Services Department.

Also new to public services is Carlos Henriquez, an Equipment Mechanic II and Alejandro Lopez Alejandro and Jose Solis-Ponce are new Senior Maintenance Workers.

Those newly promoted include Ashley Armenta, Taylor Stack and Julie Suguitan who move to Recreation Leader III and Joseph Loubet to Senior Lifeguard.

In the Police Department, 28-Year CMPD Veteran Keith Davis has been promoted to Police Captain. And Christopher Walk has been promoted to Police Sergeant

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## **Council takes historic vote to address homelessness with**

# **new bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church**

The Costa Mesa City Council voted unanimously at its Tuesday Jan. 15 meeting to move forward with a plan to partner with the Lighthouse Church of the Nazarene and expand what is an already existing inclement weather shelter into a high-security temporary solution to offer shelter beds to those in need.

In addition, the council announced to a packed house gathered at the Costa Mesa Senior Center for the meeting that it will explore the possibility of a permanent shelter and is already looking at one location at 3115 Redhill Avenue.

“In a move to protect the residents and taxpayers of Costa Mesa, last night we authorized a temporary bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church and directed staff to work with the county on a permanent shelter near the airport,” Mayor Katrina Foley said. “This means, we will be able to clear parks and residential areas from the impacts of homelessness while offering a humane response to this growing crisis.”



“Three main reasons exist to move forward with the bridge shelter and permanent sheltering plan,” Foley said. “One, a federal judge mandated this so we can again enforce our anti-camping ordinance and other laws to move people off the streets. Two, it costs less to shelter individuals than to manage the impacts of people living on the streets, in our parks and even on private property; and finally, it’s morally right.”

Mayor Foley said the goal is to restore the safety and security of the neighborhoods. She noted the plan for the temporary and permanent shelters will be to operate them in such a clean, safe, secure, and responsible manner, that it’s hard to tell they even exist.

Establishing this bridge shelter option for those experiencing homelessness will provide the 50 shelter beds that the City of Costa Mesa is expected to create based on a proposed settlement agreement in the OC Catholic Worker lawsuit that in turn would restore the city’s powers to enforce trespassing and anti-encampment ordinances.

The Lighthouse Church shelter at 1885 Anaheim Ave. will be run

by a combination of city outreach staff and an experienced, well-respected operator who will ensure the facility is a reservation-based model along with 24-hour security and management covering a half-mile radius.

“The approved temporary bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church is part of an overall Westside Restoration Plan, including many infrastructure improvements and the opening of our new library in April 2019,” Foley said. “These infrastructure improvements, coupled with reduced homelessness and its impacts, should improve the quality of life and property values on the Westside. In addition to the infrastructure projects already planned, additional lighting and fencing at the Church, we are soliciting input from the community for additional needed improvements to restore the safety and character of the neighborhood.”

Through this temporary shelter arrangement with the Lighthouse Church, the city will invest in the property creating security fencing around the church, and adding portable buildings for restrooms, storage of personal belongings, offices and space for shelter beds.

Unsheltered individuals will be offered job training and placement services, mental health assessments, health and dental care, substance abuse treatment and connections to permanent housing.

By embarking on this solution to homelessness, Costa Mesa joins the broader efforts of the cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, Orange, Tustin, Fullerton and Buena Park and the county of Orange in taking an active solution to combatting the crisis of homelessness throughout the county and beyond.

A 2017 study conducted by the University of California Irvine, United Way and Jamboree Housing estimated the annual cost of homelessness in Orange County to be \$299 million, \$120 million of which is shouldered by cities.

Costa Mesa has been a leader on this issue. Since 2013, the Network for Homeless Solutions – which includes City staff and representatives of faith-based organizations and local non-profits – meets weekly to discuss specific cases and developments in our efforts to reduce homelessness in Costa Mesa.

Costa Mesa outreach workers make contact daily with individuals experiencing homelessness and the city spends approximately \$1 million each year on this effort. Funds are expended on outreach workers as well as police officers assigned to our Community Policing Unit.

Since its inception, the Network for Homeless Solutions has helped to house more than 300 individuals as well as reconnected about 90 with family or loved ones.

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## **Costa Mesa restarts K-9 program with newest member of department Bodi**

The Costa Mesa Police Department has restarted the K-9 program and has filled two positions in the K-9 Unit, with one team already deployed.

The department has been rebuilding over the last couple of years and reestablishing the K-9 Unit has been a priority because of the benefits and elevated service it provides. K-9 Units are a force multiplier and valuable resource for police department personnel on a daily basis. The police service dogs are instrumental in building searches, article searches, and apprehension.

Additionally, police service dogs can receive specialized training in narcotics and explosive detection based on the needs of the K-9 Unit.

In 2018, CMPD took steps to reestablish the K-9 Unit by selecting its first K-9 handler, Officer Nick Dempkowski. He has been a police officer for the past six and a half years, the past two and a half years with Costa Mesa.

Dempkowski's new partner is Bodi, a 3-year-old, brindle, Dutch Shepherd from Holland. After training, the two officially went into service and began handling calls for service on Dec. 26, 2018.

Officer Candice McMorris has been selected as the department's second K-9 handler. She has been a police officer with Costa Mesa for three and a half years and is the department's first female handler. McMorris is already preparing and is waiting to select her K-9 partner sometime in March 2019, with the intent for both to be in service by May 2019.

In 1988, Costa Mesa deployed its first police service dog. Since the K-9 Unit's inception, there have been 10 K-9 handlers and twelve police service dogs, which provided a valuable resource to the department and community by assisting with the apprehension of hundreds of wanted suspects and recovering thousands of pounds of illicit narcotics. In 2011, the K-9 Unit dissolved due to a departmental contraction at the time.

Since 2011, CMPD has relied on neighboring police departments to provide K-9 services when needed.

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# **Council looks to take historic step to address homelessness in Costa Mesa**

The Costa Mesa City Council on Tuesday Jan. 15 is poised to take a historic step forward by both providing shelter beds for individuals experiencing homelessness and restoring the safety and well-being of communities and residents.

Homelessness has been one of the most pressing issues in Costa Mesa, and by establishing the next phase of a comprehensive Westside Restoration Plan, the City Council can embrace both short-term and long-term solutions to providing unsheltered individuals a place to live while developing plans for permanent housing.

“The fact is that our first responders are spending more and more time grappling with the issue of homelessness, which as a result, is putting the rest of our community’s public safety at greater risk,” Mayor Katrina Foley said. “Additionally, homelessness costs our county’s hospitals \$77 million annually, making health care more expensive for all of us. We must resolve homelessness – not only because it is so costly to taxpayers and erodes our local quality of life – but also because it leads to profound human suffering in our community. Solving this challenge is the humane and right thing to do.”



Up for approval Tuesday will be a plan for the city to engage in a partnership with the Lighthouse Church of the Nazarene to make improvements and expand what is an already existing inclement weather shelter and homeless check-in center as well as to purchase a 12,000-square-foot office building at 1040 W. 17th Street that will be redeveloped into a permanent solution to offer shelter beds to those in need. Property improvements would include exterior fencing, lighting and landscaping.

[Click here to read the staff report.](#)

“Finding permanent solutions to homelessness, improving public safety, and re-investing in our Westside neighborhoods were key priorities in the recent election,” Council Member Arlis Reynolds said. “Staff’s proposal is designed to address all of these issues while meeting our city’s legal obligations. It is very important to hear from our residents and businesses, and I encourage the public to read the staff report and share their input with council members ahead of our Tuesday meeting.”

Through this temporary shelter arrangement with the Lighthouse Church, the city would invest in the property in order to provide the 50 shelter beds that it is expected to create based on a proposed settlement agreement in the OC Catholic

Worker lawsuit that in turn would restore the city's powers to enforce trespassing and anti-encampment ordinances.

Additionally, the purchase of this \$4 million facility would allow the council to create a bridge shelter, where unsheltered individuals could also receive job training and placement, mental health assessment, health and dental care, substance abuse treatment and connections to permanent housing.

Both of these facilities would be run by a combination of city outreach staff and an experienced well-respected operator who will ensure the facility is a reservation-based model along with 24-hour security and management covering a half-mile radius.

This proposal is part of a broader Westside Restoration Plan, a commitment by the council to restore public safety and the character of Westside neighborhoods. Recent enhancements to the Westside include the Lions Park Project, Lions Park Playground Improvements, Street Rehabilitation Projects, the Harbor Median Improvement Project, the West 19th Street Bicycle Facility Improvements, Anaheim Avenue and West 18th Street Parkway Improvements, the Senior Center Fence Project and Shalimar Park Improvements.

By embarking on this solution to homelessness, Costa Mesa joins the broader efforts of the cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, Orange, Tustin, Fullerton and Buena Park and the county of Orange in taking an active solution to combatting the crisis of homelessness throughout the county and beyond.

A 2017 study conducted by the University of California Irvine, United Way and Jamboree Housing estimated the annual cost of homelessness in Orange County to be \$299 million, \$120 million of which is shouldered by cities.

Costa Mesa has been a leader on this issue. Since 2013, the Network for Homeless Solutions – which includes City staff and

representatives of faith-based organizations and local non-profits – meets weekly to discuss specific cases and developments in our efforts to reduce homelessness in Costa Mesa.

Costa Mesa outreach workers make contact daily with individuals experiencing homelessness and the city spends approximately \$1 million each year on this effort. Funds are expended on outreach workers as well as police officers assigned to our Community Policing Unit.

In addition, Mayor Pro-Tem John Stephens is currently the Chairman of the ACC-OC Homelessness Task Force, an advocacy group for Orange County cities.

“It is my goal to substantially reduce homelessness in Costa Mesa,” said Council Member Stephens. “I am proud that we as a city are pursuing the creation of this Bridge Shelter and I hope this will be a first step in providing permanent supportive housing to those in need.”

The timing is right for these efforts. Last February, with Stephens at the helm of the Homelessness Task Force, ACC-OC rolled out a plan to develop 2,700 permanent supportive housing units throughout Orange County over the next seven years.

Both private and public funding would be used to achieve this goal, and existing legislation has established the Orange County Housing Trust, which may be used to pool public (i.e., state grants) and private funds to provide financing for the permanent supportive housing projects.

Other cities are also making great strides in this area. The Orchard, developed by Community Development Partners and operated by Mercy House, is a successful example of a permanent supportive housing project in Santa Ana. Formerly a dilapidated, abandoned motel, most of the residents of the 71-unit project were relocated from the Civic Center encampment.

These individuals are now permanently off the streets. Another noteworthy example is the Cove in Newport Beach, recently launched by Community Development Partners and Mercy House. The Cove is a permanent supportive apartment complex serving formerly homeless veterans and seniors.

To reach the City Council please [click here](#) to access each individual council member's page or email the entire council at [citycouncil@costamesaca.gov](mailto:citycouncil@costamesaca.gov).

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## **CMPD Veteran Keith Davis promoted to captain**

The Costa Mesa Police Department is proud to announce the promotion of one of its six lieutenants to the position of police captain. After a competitive promotion process, Keith Davis was selected to serve as captain and will oversee the Support Services Division.

This includes the Investigative Services Bureau, Records and Evidence Bureau, Telecommunications Bureau, and the Office of Emergency Management.

Davis, a 28-year veteran of the department, began his career at CMPD in 1991 and worked patrol until he promoted to sergeant in 2005. Davis' supervisory responsibilities through his tenure as sergeant included patrol, gang enforcement, SWAT, and Emergency Services.

In 2013, Davis promoted to lieutenant and for the first two years served as Area Commander for one of two geographic deployment areas. Meanwhile, Davis kept his SWAT assignment and would remain in that detail for 24 years, the last seven

serving as SWAT Commander. He went on to serve as the Telecommunications Bureau Lieutenant until his recent promotion to captain, effective Dec. 23, 2018. Davis fills a vacancy left by former Captain Mark Manley after his departure in September 2018.

Davis has a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University, and he has accrued certifications from the California Peace Officers Standards and Training. He also graduated from the Sherman Block Supervisory Leadership Institute in 2012. Davis has been recognized as Officer of the Year and Supervisor of the Year, among other recognitions.

He is affiliated with a number of law enforcement associations, including the National Association of Tactical Officers and the Orange County Emergency Managers Organization.

“Captain Davis brings 28 years of dedicated service to this critical position,” said Chief Sharpnack. “He has amassed an exceptional background through a breadth of assignments and operations. Throughout his career, Captain Davis has served us well as a successful and respected leader. It is my privilege to see Captain Davis earn this significant professional achievement.”

“I’m honored and truly appreciative of this opportunity,” said Captain Davis. “I thank Chief Sharpnack for recognizing my accomplishments during my career and affording me the chance to continue serving the community and Department as a Captain. I am blessed to have worked with and learned from some of the brightest and most professional public safety personnel, and for this I am truly grateful. I would be seriously remiss if I didn’t thank the most important people in my life my family, who have had to sacrifice in some ways more than I during the last 28 years. Their support and understanding has been invaluable. I am proud to serve as Captain of Support Services and I look forward to the continued success of our team.”

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# **Library at Lions Park to temporarily close Friday Jan. 11**

The County of Orange is planning to close the current Donald Dungan Library in Lions Park this Friday Jan. 11, 2019 in order to prepare the new building to be ready for opening day on Friday, April 26 at 10 a.m.

During this closure, the Costa Mesa Senior Center will offer limited, temporary, computer lab hours to members of the public during the closure of the Donald Dungan Library.

## **Temporary Hours:**

- Monday and Wednesday – 9:00 a.m. -10:30 a.m.
- Tuesday, Thursday and Friday – 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- Saturday – 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Here are the library services that will still be available to the public:

- A book share cart at the Downtown Recreation Center where library patrons can return and check-out books during the closure.
- The Rec Center Book Club will continue at the Senior Center.
- The Children's Librarian will continue offering story time three mornings a week, (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday).

Lastly, the County will be permanently closing the Technology Library located at 2263 Fairview Road on Jan. 31, 2019. The County's staff at the Technology Library will be moving to the new Library when it opens in April.

These times are subject to change without prior notice and not offered on holidays. We thank you for your patience during these exciting times as we prepare to open the new library.

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## **City to hold meeting on improvements to Lions Park Playground this Saturday Jan. 12**

The City of Costa Mesa Department of Public Services is hosting a neighborhood meeting to discuss and receive input on various improvements at the Lions Park Playground.

The meeting will take place from 10 a.m. to 12 noon at the Downtown Recreation Center.

The new library at Lions Park, with approximately 23,000 square feet of learning space for children and adults, is near completion with grand opening scheduled for April 26, 2019. This phase also includes the new one-acre open park space north of the library building. As part of the Lions Park Improvements, a new neighborhood community center will take the place of the existing library to provide multipurpose room and meeting space.

In anticipation of these exciting improvements at Lions park, the City is initiating plans for improvements to the playground area south of the new library. The playground's main feature is a Grumman F9F-2 Panther jet flown by the U.S. Navy in the 1950s. The plane was installed in 1960 and will remain as part of the improved playground. This project will

provide new play equipment, enhanced play area, landscaping, irrigation, supporting facilities, lighting and concrete pathways.

Resident input is valuable as we undertake design of this important project for the community. If residents are not able to attend this meeting, they may submit written correspondence to the attention of Arash Rahimian, Senior Engineer, City of Costa Mesa, 77 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, California 92626 or via email at: [Arash.Rahimian@costamesaca.gov](mailto:Arash.Rahimian@costamesaca.gov).

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## **New Chief of Staff and Council Aides hired to assist mayor and council**

The City of Costa Mesa created a new constituent services staff team to better serve residents and hired a full-time chief of staff for the Mayor and City Council as well as three part-time council aides, who will assist the new seven-member council to respond to community concerns, assist with legislative research and outreach and help implement the community's priorities for neighborhood improvement.

Connor Lock, currently a legislative analyst for the Long Beach City Council, will become the City Council's new chief of staff.

In this role, he will be responsible for managing constituent services, legislative research and analysis, coordination with Federal and State offices, special projects and ensuring the Mayor and Councilmembers are fully briefed and prepared for council meetings, press events, and community meetings.

“With a population of about 115,000 and a budget of more than \$160 million, the amount of work expected of the Costa Mesa City Council continues to expand,” Mayor Katrina Foley said. “Add to this the addition of two new council members, and the timing was right to increase the resources and support for the council to better serve the community. I look forward to working closely with the new chief of staff and council aides.”

Prior to serving as legislative analyst in Long Beach, Lock was the political analyst for Long Beach’s Vice Mayor Dee Andrews and was an intern to Congressman Adam Schiff. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Georgetown University and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in public administration from Cal State Long Beach. Lock will start with the city on Tuesday Jan. 22.

The newly hired part-time council aides are Hadassa Jakher, Alberto Ruiz and Ivis Torres. The new aides will work up to 20 hours a week and will assist City Council Members with constituent services, outreach, response to requests and analysis and perform other related duties as assigned.

Jakher is currently a planning intern for Community Development in the city of Menifee and prior to that she was a Public Service Fellow for the Western Riverside Council of Governments and a Political and Economic Intern for the US Consulate General Barcelona. She has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Government and Spanish and minors in Latin American Studies, International Relations and Law & Society from Cornell University.

Ruiz was most recently a Senior Field Representative for the Assembly Majority Floor Leader in the 57th Assembly District and prior to that he was a Policy Intern for the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies in Sacramento. He has a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science from UCLA and he is currently enrolled in the Master of Public Policy

program at UCI.

Torres is a Costa Mesa resident and is currently the NICU Inpatient Unit Secretary at Children's Hospital of Orange County. Prior to her work at CHOC, she was the Program Coordinator for Save Our Youth in Costa Mesa. She has extensive volunteer experience in the PTA at Paularino School and Save Our Youth. She has an Associates of Arts Degree in Liberal Arts from Golden West College and she is in the process of enrolling in a university to obtain her Bachelor's Degree.

All three council aides will start on Thursday Jan. 24.

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## **Sandbags available at City Hall and Sanitary District yard to help residents prevent flooding**

With inclement weather expected to hit Costa Mesa and Orange County over the coming days, the City of Costa Mesa and the Costa Mesa Sanitary district will offer self serve sandbag services.

The city services are in the rear parking lot of City Hall, located at 77 Fair Drive. Sand, bags and shovels are available and the number of sandbags is limited to 15 per household.

The Costa Mesa Sanitary District established a sandbag station at the district's yard. The station will be available before and during inclement weather conditions.



The district's yard is located at 174 W. Wilson Street. Costa Mesa Sanitary District will provide the bags and sand, but residents must bring their own shovel.

Additionally, Maintenance Services staff will be patrolling potential flooding spots to make sure catch basins are clear of debris and operational throughout the city.

For information on sandbags [click here](#).

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## **Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue veteran Chris Coates named as department's new battalion chief**

Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue Chief Dan Stefano announced on Thursday Jan. 3 that there is a new member of the department's

command staff as Capt. Chris Coates has been promoted to become one of the city's three Fire Battalion Chiefs.

Coates has been a captain since 2003 and most recently served as the department's Administrative and Training Captain, where he maintained the duties of the Public Information Officer and Emergency Medical Services Manager as well as overseeing Training Program and Social Media Program Management.

"Chris is a respected fire service professional and leader who truly understands and embraces the value of building strong relationships, providing exceptional service, professional development, being authentic, and getting comfortable being uncomfortable," Chief Stefano said. "We look forward to his leadership contributions being elevated to a new level, as the expectations for him will continue to be raised, with my full confidence that he will rise to the occasion."

As the new Battalion Chief, Coates returns to the field and will oversee an entire shift of personnel, as well as becoming part of the department's executive management team and taking on additional administrative responsibilities. He will be based out of the city's new Fire Station No. 1. Captain Coates fills the position that became vacant with the recent retirement of Battalion Chief Kevin Diamond. His official start date will be January 21, 2019.

"First, I would like to thank Fire Chief Stefano for this amazing opportunity," Capt. Coates said. "I'm honored and humbled and look forward to serving the city and community and fire family as battalion chief. Further, I am grateful for the relationships I've made with my city staff colleagues and value their expertise and experience. Working side-by-side with them has been so meaningful to my career and that will only expand in my new role. Finally, and most importantly, if it wasn't for the unwavering support and love from my family, none of this would be possible."

Coates has more than 23 years of experience in the fire service and started his career in 1996 as a Firefighter/Paramedic for the City of Escondido Fire Department and later worked for the City of Garden Grove before hiring on in Costa Mesa in 1998.

Coates has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Applied Studies from Brandman University, an Associate of Arts Degree from Santa Ana College, and recently finished his first year in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program.

He has previously served as the President for the Orange County Fire Chiefs Training Officers Section and currently serves as the President for the California Fire Chiefs Training Officers – Southern Division, among several other honors and distinctions.

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## **Street sweeping will be postponed during the Christmas and New Year Holidays**

Due to the observation of the Christmas and New Year Holidays, there will be no residential street sweeping beginning Monday, Dec. 24, 2018 through Tuesday, Jan 1, 2019.

Street sweeping will resume on Wednesday January 2, 2019

The street sweeping postponement coincides with the Costa Mesa Sanitary District, which also observes these holidays by pushing trash collection back one day.

This results in residential gutter lines being cluttered with trash cans making it impossible for street sweeper operators to do an efficient job. There should be no parking citations issued during this time. Parking enforcement should resume Monday, Jan. 7, 2019.

In lieu of sweeping streets, the following are a list of task that Clean Streets operators will be conducting next week.

- City wide alley street sweeping
- Sweeping of park parking lots and other city owned facilities
- Accident call outs and special request
- Night route sweeping on all arterial streets

For more information, residents can call the city's street sweeping hotline at (714) 327-7471, which has been updated with this information.

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## **City and local biologists begin burrowing owl banding project at Fairview Park**

The Costa Mesa Parks and Community Services Department has partnered with local biologists to launch a Burrowing Owl banding project that follows state protocols and contributes to a larger study of this important and charming, but declining bird species found at Fairview Park.

Observations at the park over the last few years indicated there was just one bird passing through in their migratory

route this time of year. However, earlier this season, reports came into the City indicating that there were sightings of more than one bird at a time, using different locations in the park.

Because this is a species of concern throughout the western hemisphere, Fairview Park Administrator, Cynthia D'Agosta and the City's contract biologist, Barry Nerhus, investigated the possibility of becoming part of the statewide banding program to understand the park's role in helping to preserve the Burrowing Owl.

"This is an exciting time to undertake this project and it's by no means complete," D'Agosta said. "We are getting daily reports from park users of more owl sightings. The goal of this is to understand the population we have that use Fairview Park and whether they come back year after year."

Conservation concerns for this species differ by region, and they are also of conservation concern in Canada and Mexico where they nest. The State of California lists the Burrowing Owl as a species of special concern which protects the birds and their nests by California Fish and Game Code and the U. S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Strong local, state, federal and international interest in this species has facilitated significant conservation efforts to maintain or revive populations, including reintroduction programs, the use of artificial nest burrows, habitat protection programs, protective legislation, and a banding program for tracking migration.

In California, Imperial County is known as a Burrowing Owl hot spot; it is estimated that 70 percent of the state's population (or about 4,000 breeding pairs) and 50 percent of the U.S. population breeds in that county. Visual tracking this year by trained eyes, have observed that from Santa Barbara south, only 20 nesting pairs have been seen on the

coast. The last and closest sighting to Fairview Park, was a few years back when a banded owl was caught at Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station as it was migrating from Washington state.

The City reached out to Pete Bloom, principal of Bloom Biological, Inc, (BBI) known as the state expert on numerous biological assessments and avian research projects, (including the Burrowing Owl), to implement the program. (BBI holds permits or memoranda of understanding for participating in the conservation and recovery of more than a dozen endangered, threatened species, or special-status species, in California and the western United States).

Over the last two weeks, Bloom and Nerhus have captured and banded two Burrowing Owls within Fairview Park. Based on the feathers, both owls have been determined to be a "hatch year bird" (meaning it was born spring of 2018).

Due to the age, their sex cannot be identified yet. They are believed to be wintering at Fairview Park, traveling as part of the migratory bird route possibly between Canada and Southern / Central Americas where the owls winter.

After banding, each owl was released into their highly used burrow where they could hide and gather their composure.

Each owl now has a silver metal United States Geological Survey (USGS) Band that goes into the Cornell Bird Banding Lab database. We will be able to see where these two critters go, and whether or not they return to Fairview Park next season. We will also keep an eye out for more owls.

The public is always asked to keep dogs on leash in our parks, but this is even more critical during this migratory time. If you happen to observe a Burrowing Owl, please keep your distance and do not disturb. We want them to feel welcomed and comfortable in their habitats.