

# Manhattan Beach Sun

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## Weekend Weather Forecast

### Friday

Sunny

82°



### Saturday

Sunny

78°



### Sunday

Mostly Sunny

72°



## Hometown Fair 2009



Kaitlyn Kelly (center) shows off her balloon hat with friends, Laurel Behrens (left) and Renee Ventura (right) Photos by Shelley Kemp. For more photos go to [www.Kemp.Photorelect.com](http://www.Kemp.Photorelect.com)

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## Council Dissolves Underground District 8, Delays District 13

By Evan Ortega

In a 3-2 vote, the City Council voted to dissolve Underground Utility District 8 and then stalled the public hearing and voting process for District 13 amid concerns over calculations of assessment fees.

Residents from both Districts on each side of the issue attended the meeting to voice their concerns. People in favor of undergrounding touted safety and aesthetic benefits, while others said people on fixed incomes and those suffering from the recession would suffer from the high cost. Assessments for District 13 range from \$623 to \$115,520 and the median assessment is \$21,499. Residents would also have to pay at least several thousand dollars extra to hook their homes up to the new utilities.

Mayor Portia Cohen and Council members Mitch Ward and Wayne Powell voted to dissolve District 8, bounded by Eighth Street, Fifteenth Street, Manhattan Avenue, and the Strand. They voiced concerns over previous votes regarding the District, which was formed under the oversight of previous Councils. "I think it's just inappropriate for us to move forward, especially with District 8," Ward said. "I was one of those on Council that said, 'no I didn't want to move District 8 forward'...the people had spoken clearly."

Cohen referenced the high assessments, which are much higher than originally estimated because of miscommunication between the city and a utility. "This puts in question for me at least, the validity of the results of the initial surveys as it begs the question as to whether these Districts would have made the cut had the estimated surveys been realistic," Cohen said. "This is especially important to the fate of District 8, which as we know resulted in a fifty-point-four vote, percent much less than the process the Council had set as a threshold, sixty percent."

The mayor said she sympathized with District 8 proponents, but because of the economic downturn, she was not ready to

enforce the Council's will on a minority. "Utility undergrounding, while desirable, is not an essential service such as water and sewer infrastructure," Cohen said. "As much as I would like to see our utility wires underground for aesthetic reasons only, I don't put them in the same category as our utilities such as water and sewer. We are already trying to raise the rates there."

Ward mentioned longtime residents who might have already paid their home off and were reluctant to get back into debt. "Once I'm able to pay my house off a little bit I'm not thrilled about putting another forty or fifty-thousand dollars onto my property taxes," Ward said. "It's very difficult for me to accept."

Council members Nick Tell and Richard Montgomery voted to preserve the District. Montgomery said he thought the residents in District 8 should have the opportunity to vote. "We're talking about stripping the right of people who've waited eight or ten years to vote," Montgomery said. "We're going to say 'OK you've waited eight or ten years and we're going to strip away the right of you to vote on that.'"

### District 13

The Council asked its contracted engineer to revise its process of determining the assessment each residence would be charged. The current methodology involves the square footage of the residence and takes into consideration the benefits of increased aesthetics, safety and reliability.

Engineer Joan Cox said she devised the methodology in order for it to stand up to the scrutiny of the courts in the event of litigation, and also out of fairness to the residents. Residents questioned the fairness of the methodology and many thought engineers didn't give square footage enough weight.

Ward called the methodology problematic. "We know that there is a fixed cost with the District and that has to be split amongst all the parcels in that District," Ward said. "And

then you come up with a very convoluted formula...it puts us city leaders in a bad quagmire when we are supposed to impose this on the residents."

Tell agreed, noting that people on both sides of the issue thought the methodology should be revised. "I know it's been a long time coming and we've got to get it right and do it right," Tell said. "I think taking the extra time is worthwhile, especially when you have proponents of District 13 telling us that we need to do this."

Council members agreed and gave Cox a month to make revisions. The Council will discuss the changes on November 17.

### Sand Dune Closure

Council members voted unanimously to keep the dune at Sand Dune Park closed until they decide to reopen it, and directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to find solutions to neighborhood problems caused by people at the dune. The Council has already directed the Public and Parking Improvements Commission (PPIC) to explore parking meters and a permit program in the area. Both commissions will present their findings and recommendations to the Council when they are finished.

The city closed the dune in August, after residents complained about ongoing neighborhood problems caused by the massive numbers of people who work out on the dune, known by the mayor as "Duners."

### Rotary Club Project

Members of the Rotary Club of Manhattan Beach were recognized for their recent community service project at Joslyn Center. Volunteers planted drought tolerant plants and painted the interior of the building. President Jan Rhees said that during the course of the project, Rotarians found a need to replace a two-divider sink with a three-divider sink. She said the new sink will enable volunteers to feed double the number of seniors and older adults. "I went by the following Monday

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