

Bell Gardens

FALL
2019

Today

EXPLORERS GAIN
CAREER TRAINING
THROUGH
PUBLIC SERVICE

IN THIS ISSUE

- MEET THE NEW CITY MANAGER
- THE CENSUS IS COMING!
- MISS BELL GARDENS PAGEANT TO RETURN
- BELL GARDENS ADOPTS 2019-2020 BALANCED BUDGET
- NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES
- HOMELESS PROBLEM ADDRESSED WITH COMPASSION



Everything you need for FALL - Complete recreation program information inside.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CITY MANAGER



Meet Bell Gardens new City Manager, Michael B. O'Kelly. He's an Army veteran, experienced in air quality and great with numbers. He's also been working in government for more than 20 years and brings a wide variety of management skills to his new position.

His goals for the first six months of his tenure include bringing stability to the management team and staff; meeting and understanding the needs, satisfaction and concerns of the various stakeholders of the City; and making measurable improvements towards achieving the vision, mission, and goals of Bell Gardens.

"I was attracted to the City of Bell Gardens by several things," O'Kelly said. "A new City Council with fresh ideas, energy, and the will to make their City a better place to live; the fact that the City's challenges line up well with experience that I have gained over the last 20 years serving in local and regional government. The City has the same socioeconomic and demographic makeup of the city I grew up in, San Bernardino, and so I feel very comfortable in my understanding of how the Bell Gardens' residents and businesses view the City and also how the City can make a positive impact on the lives of the residents and businesses."

O'Kelly was drawn to public service because of his natural desire to help people and be productive. He believes in the greater good and that the actions of individuals can have great positive or negative impacts on society.

He joined the U.S. Army right out of high school, serving as a surveyor, and left the service four years later with the rank of Sergeant. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting and his Masters Degree in Public Administration from



California State University San Bernardino. He is a licensed Certified Public Accountant and holds a certificate in Grants Management.

After graduation, he worked as Chief of Fiscal Services for the then \$5 Billion San Bernardino County Employees Retirement Association and the Finance Officer for the then \$2 Billion San Bernardino County Treasurer-Tax Collector/Public Administrator's Office. In 2010, he became the Chief Financial Officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, leaving that agency as the Chief Administrative Officer in 2018 to join the City of Fullerton as the Administrative Services Director. Away from City Hall, he enjoys spending time with his wife of 26 years and their three school-age children.

A strategic planning session with the City Council is in his plan, which will affirm the Council's vision and mission statement for the City and allow the Council to develop measurable goals and prioritize objectives. He anticipates the focus of the Council to be public safety, financial and organizational stability, community services and protection of the environment. In addition, the issues of parking and traffic, resident safety, recreational opportunities, beautification efforts, Census 2020 participation and long-term financial stability of the City will be discussed and addressed.

As always, the City wants to hear about your concerns. Send your questions and suggestions to Talk2Us@bellgardens.org.

NOTICE TO RESIDENTS

THE CENSUS IS COMING! THE CENSUS IS COMING!

The City of Bell Gardens wants residents to be ready to participate in the 2020 Census coming up in the spring and are organizing staff and volunteers to make the effort a success. The Census is a nationwide effort to count every person in the United States every 10 years. Data collected is used to distribute federal funds, allocate community services and distribute Congressional seats to the states.

In March, every household in America will receive an invitation to respond online to the 2020 Census. Some households will also receive paper questionnaires. Reminders will be sent to those households that don't respond by mid-April, in the form of postcards, letters and possibly paper questionnaires that can be mailed in.

Getting an accurate count of the City's residents is a team effort. Recently, the City Council authorized the establishment

of a multi-faceted group of leaders (comprised of local, county, state and federal representatives) to promote and help residents participate; confirmed that City Hall will be the site for a Census Action Kiosk (where people can get information and complete Census forms) and plans to recruit volunteers to serve as Census Goodwill Ambassadors.

The Census Goodwill Ambassadors will receive training which will give them the information and tools to support outreach efforts and will attend community events and walk the streets to encourage residents to be counted, as well as make specific household visits if those residents have not completed their Census forms by late April. The training will help them have the information and tools to provide consistent and reliable information and feedback to community residents.

CITY OFFICIALS

Bell Gardens City Council

Alejandra Cortez, Mayor
Lisseth Flores, Mayor Pro Tem
Pedro Aceituno, Council Member
Marco Barcena, Council Member
Jennifer Rodriguez, Council Member

Michael B. O'Kelly, City Manager

The public is welcome at all City meetings, which are held in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 7100 Garfield Avenue, Bell Gardens:

CITY COUNCIL

2nd and 4th Monday of the month at 6 p.m.
Notice of Special City Council Meetings will be posted at City Hall and City facilities.

EDUCATION COMMISSION

2nd Thursday of the month at 5 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

3rd Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

RECREATION, CULTURAL AND YOUTH COMMISSION

3rd Thursday of the month at 6 p.m.

SENIOR CITIZEN COMMISSION

2nd Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMISSION

1st Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m.

MISS BELL GARDENS PAGEANT TO RETURN

A popular city-sponsored program is making a comeback after a short hiatus.

"We are planning the return of the Miss Bell Gardens program and are looking for highly motivated and committed young women in our community to be part of this exciting journey," said Ana Avalos, Recreation and Community Services Supervisor.

The women will prepare for the Miss Bell Gardens program through a series of enrichment classes including art, fitness, etiquette, public speaking, wellness, professional development, and excursions.

The idea is to develop them to be ambassadors for Bell Gardens and future leaders in the community. The program is open to women ages 15-22, and they must reside in Bell Gardens.

Interest cards can be picked up at the Parks and Recreation offices, or for more information please call **(562)806-7650**.

"This will be an experience of a lifetime," Avalos added.



On the Cover:
Bell Gardens Police Explorers present the colors at a recent event

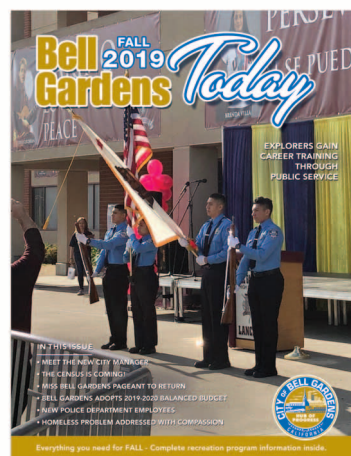
ON THE LEVEL WITH THE PUBLIC WORKS SIDEWALK CREW

If you've spotted some young people armed with spray cans working with guys pushing heavy duty cement grinders, you've seen a Bell Gardens Public Works crew doing their annual sidewalk survey and repair. Sidewalk inspections are done every 12 months and this year, Explorers from Bell Gardens Police Department were assisting, marking any areas of the sidewalks that were lifted more than 3/4 inch. As the lifts were recorded and marked, Public Works crews would grind and make minor repairs.

Public Works crews have removed and replaced approximately 75 yards of concrete sidewalks in 50 locations over the past

year. As a member agency of the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority, Bell Gardens established the annual sidewalk inspection and repair program for all hazardous conditions to minimize the possibility of injury to residents and visitors of the City.

After receiving service requests and observing areas with high foot traffic, a list was created for repair crews to make more significant repairs. Over the summer, repairs are scheduled for the sidewalks and gutters on Muller St., Lanto St., Lubec St., Cecilia St., Colman Ave., Watcher St., Live Oak St., Gephart Ave. and Ira Avenue. Annually, Public Works staff grinds 3,000 sidewalk locations, removing and replacing about 50 locations with approximately one yard of concrete each and removing/replacing about five locations with 10 yards of concrete each. The department has an annual budget of \$150,000 for equipment and materials for sidewalk repairs and from 2012-2017, zero settlements were paid out due to uneven pavement.



Bell Gardens Today is published quarterly by the City of Bell Gardens to provide information to the community about the City's programs, services and activities.

Visit us at www.bellgardens.org for updated City information.

Go to www.bgrecreation.org for recreation programs and events. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

BELL GARDENS ADOPTS 2019-2020 BALANCED BUDGET



The City Council recently adopted the General Fund Budget for fiscal year 2019-2020 that projects a surplus of \$40,000. Despite this projected surplus, the City faces multiple fiscal challenges.

“The fiscal 2019-20 General Fund budget is balanced with a slight surplus of \$40,000. Revenues for the fiscal year are projected to be higher by \$2,142,000 driven by an increase in budgeted casino revenue of \$1,280,000, and expenditures are lower by \$547,000,” said Will Kaholokula, Director of Finance and Administrative Services. “Although the City budget is balanced, there are fiscal challenges facing the city. The City is looking to implement strategies that will continue to improve the City’s fiscal health while maintaining city services.”

The proposed General Fund budget places a hold on all capital outlay requests and increases in most supply, services and personnel requests. The Water Utility Fund continues to operate at a deficit and borrow cash from the General Fund. The Council also approved an additional allocation of \$100,000 for City events, including a 5K run and health fair and the return of the Miss Bell Gardens pageant.

There are \$9.8 million in newly-funded Capital Improvement Projects, the majority of them related to roads and traffic and funded by restricted taxes or grants. Only the Ford Park Cistern projects requires matching funds from the General Fund.

Income from the Bicycle Casino has increased and comprises 45 percent of the total budget. Overall, General Fund revenues increased by 2,142,000 to a total projected amount of \$31,756,000. The increase in General Fund revenue was driven by Casino revenues, property leases, motor vehicle in lieu, and interest income.

General Fund FY 2019-20 proposed expenditures are \$31,716,000. This represents a decrease from the prior fiscal year of about 1.7% or \$547,000. As mentioned earlier, most requested General Fund equipment and

capital purchases have been frozen along with other requested departmental increases in supplies, services and personnel. Additionally, for fiscal FY 2019-20, a vacancy savings rate of 2.5% was implemented to project the anticipated savings from current and future vacancies. The projected vacancy savings is \$410,000 for FY 2019-20.

There are specific fiscal challenges and trends facing the City:

- *Revenues are not keeping up with expenditures. Without new revenue sources or significant growth, current service levels will not be maintained.*
- *Retiree healthcare costs are increasing.*
- *The Water Utility Fund continues to operate at a deficit and borrow cash from the General Fund. By June 2020, \$2,970,000 will be owed to the General Fund.*
- *Pension costs are rising.*
- *Capital replacement: Aging infrastructure and equipment must be provided for to maintain the expected level of continuous service.*
- *Casino income is somewhat volatile and prone to large shifts upward and downward. State actions could negatively impact casino revenue, which comprises 45 percent of the City budget. The loss of this funding could have a major impact on City operations and result in cutbacks in services such as public safety.*

Solutions to these challenges will be derived from a combination of increasing revenue through new sources or enhancing current ones and by making structural changes.

“The budget is a spending plan of projected revenues and budgeted expenditures,” Kaholokula said. “Throughout the year, the budget will be constantly monitored. Changes in estimates will be communicated to City Council and adjustments will be made.”

A REMINDER: CANOPIES AND TARPS ARE NOT PERMITTED IN CITY LIMITS

Code Enforcement officials would like to remind residents that the use of canopies or tarp structures are restricted in all residential zones in the City. These “tent-like” covers may be inexpensive, but they are often made of materials that are not fire-retardant and could pose a fire hazard. They are also subject to weather-related collapse when not adequately braced and anchored, in addition to them being an unsightly solution to covered parking on residential properties.

Canopies and tarps violate the Bell Gardens Zoning Ordinance, the Los Angeles County Building Code and State of California fire regulations. Neither canopies or tarps may be used in front yards or over driveways to shelter vehicles as a substitute for a garage or carport. For further



information on the use of canopies or tarps, contact the Community Development Department at **(562) 806-7700**.

WATER RATE EQUITY SOUGHT FOR ALL RESIDENTS

The Bell Gardens City Council recently acted to balance the inequity of water rates within the City and fund much-needed improvements in the water delivery system, passing a resolution to conduct a cost survey and solicit public input.

Residents and businesses in the City are served by two water systems: the City-owned water system serves approximately 1,640 metered customers or 30 percent of the population in the northern portion of the City. Currently, the average City-owned water company bimonthly bill is \$54.48. Although expenses have increased and maintenance has been deferred due to lack of funds, there have been no cost increases for ratepayers since 1990.

The other 70 percent of water customers in Bell Gardens are served by Golden State Water Company, which has increased rates over the years to keep up with fees charged by water purveyors and infrastructure repairs required for the system to operate at optimum efficiency. GSWC customers pay \$138.58 bimonthly.

The City has subsidized cost overages of \$2.3 million for customers of the City-owned water company since 2012. With the goal of a self-sustaining Water Enterprise Fund (which has been running at a deficit for the last seven years), the City Council has directed staff to conduct a water rate, publicize the proposed rate increases and hold a public hearing to solicit input from its customers.

Water sales revenues should have increased beginning in 2011 to keep pace with maintenance operations and preserve a citywide equitable water rate. Most of the existing Bell Gardens Water system is more than 60 years old; fire flows in many areas are below standard, thus compromising public safety; operation and

maintenance costs will continue to increase at an estimated rate of \$250,000 annually, along with other costs such as electricity and pumping assessment. In addition, the City is responsible for a significant bond debt payment of \$600,000 per year.

Graduated rate increases over the next five years would allow for equipment and operations to be brought up to current standards; the City would also take advantage of its current Disadvantaged Community status to apply for grant money to be used for improvements when available and staff would be able to explore an additional connection to another water agency or add a second water well to improve reliability.

In a survey of other water systems in Bell Gardens and surrounding cities, it was found that other local water systems have rates that are 48 to 155 percent higher for residential and non-residential service. Increasing water rates to a comparable rate throughout all of Bell Gardens would provide citywide equity and stop the drain on General Fund resources.



EXPLORERS INVEST IN THEIR FUTURE BY SERVING THE COMMUNITY



You've seen them on the streets, helping neighbors fix their property, or working alongside Public Works crews marking uplifted sidewalks. They might have sold you a pink patch or helped install your smoke detector. Community service is just part of their investment in the future.

These young people are members of the award-winning Bell Gardens Police Department Explorer Post 673, which has served the community and Police Department since its founding in the 1980s. Currently 30 members strong, the program for residents between the ages of 14 and 21 provides a structure of service and enrichment, with a look to a possible future career in law enforcement.

Applicants attend the Explorer academy run by the LA County Sheriff's Department, an 18-Saturday commitment to early mornings and late evenings that allow candidates to observe and experience the rigors of law enforcement, participate in physical training and competitions, study techniques, case law, dealing with the public and the legal foundation required of every police officer in the field.

Post 673 also competes in regional and national events where they demonstrate the skills they have learned in academics, legalities and case law, and are quizzed on their abilities to perform in various scenarios.

"There might be a DUI scenario and mock investigation at 8 a.m. and at 1 p.m., a domestic violence investigation. Throughout the day, there are obstacle courses where they race, climb walls, do pushups and such, all components of their training," explained Sr. Officer Edward Roberts, the Post 673 advisor. "Last year, our Post came home with several first place awards."

All Explorer Posts have a quasi-military rank structure, with corporals, sergeants, lieutenants and the Senior Explorer serves as the Post Captain.

"The program is focused on philanthropy as well as law enforcement training," Roberts continued. "We stress giving of themselves. We've assisted the Red Cross' fire prevention program passing out smoke detectors, identified a local senior who needed help with painting and cleanup with the exterior of her property, assisted Public Works with identifying dangerous sidewalks. We've saved the City money by doing the survey. The big thing I push on them is giving back to the community."

Roberts is mindful of the Explorers' volunteer status and makes sure the program is balanced with physical activity and helping the kids focus on the future.

"The primary goal is to get the kids career ready and career focused. Whether they pursue a career in law enforcement





or not, just to get the kids with the mindset to value their education, the opportunities available to them, college, giving them a work ethic, doing the right thing when no one is looking and giving of themselves,” Roberts said.

Parents interested in involving their children in the Explorer program should come to the Police Station and pick up an application package in the lobby. They can come to any of the regular meetings, held the first and third Mondays of each month, and an advisor will chat with them and explain the expectations of the Explorers and what the family can expect from the program.

Applicants must have a minimum 2.0 grade point average to participate and Roberts said advisors often counsel the kids on academics.

“Our goal is to help the parents,” he said. “We can’t demand 4.0 GPAs, but we stress the basics: report writing, good grammar skills, analytics. We can help with issues in academics. We’re here to help the kids succeed. ”



RESERVE OFFICERS PROVIDE CRITICAL SUPPORT

The Bell Gardens Police Department is hoping to build up its reserves – recruiting Reserve Officers to work alongside its regular patrol officers keeping the City safe and secure, as well as providing additional staff for community programs and special events.

The Reserve program was re-launched in 2017 and two candidates are currently working in the program. Reserve officers are members of the community who go through special training and perform the functions of a fully-uniformed police officer as volunteers under the direct supervision of a fully sworn officer.

There are three grades of reserve police officers defined by law; the first two receive academy and Peace Officer Standards and Training and may or may not require continual supervision; the third are volunteers who do not perform law enforcement functions, serving as chaplains or other technical specialists.

Senior Officer Edward Roberts, who has been with the Bell Gardens Police Department for 10 years, is the coordinator for the Reserve program and knows firsthand the value of reserve officer service.

“The whole idea of serving as a reserve is involving members of the community in the well-being of the community by getting involved with the police department.” Roberts completed the police academy and volunteered to gain field experience, serving with the Monterey Park Police Department as a Reserve Officer. “It greatly helped my chances to become a full-time officer at Bell Gardens,” he said.

To get involved with Bell Gardens Police Department’s reserve program, email eroberts@bgpd.org or visit the front desk at 7100 Garfield Avenue, Bell Gardens.

NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

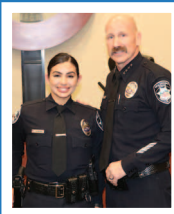
ERIC PEREZ –

Officer Perez is a native Southern Californian, born in Torrance and raised in Gardena. A graduate of Gardena High School, he attended Los Angeles Harbor College and California State University, Dominguez Hills, where he earned his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in 2017. While in school, Officer Perez was a Police Explorer for the Gardena PD, a Police Cadet for Huntington Beach PD and an intern for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. He is married and has a young son. Officer Perez is currently assigned to Patrol.



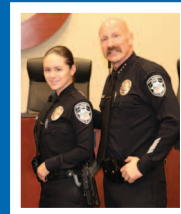
MELISSA MARTINEZ –

Officer Martinez was born and raised in Long Beach and attended Wilson Classical High School. From an early age, she developed an interest in helping others. This desire to serve her community ultimately led towards an interest in law enforcement. She earned her Associate degree in Administration of Justice from Golden West College in Huntington Beach. She is currently working towards her Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from California State University, Fullerton and was named to the Dean's Honors list for the Fall 2018 semester. She became a member of the Bell Gardens Police Department in February and looks forward to spending her career here in the City.



NICOLLE QUENGA –

Officer Quenga hails from the Inland Empire community of Apple Valley and participated in varsity Track and Field and Cross Country all four years of high school. She continues to run 5 and 10Ks for fun and enjoys spending the majority of her time outdoors hiking, exploring and being anywhere close to water. She spent the first 10 years of her career in the medical field, graduating from California State University, San Bernardino in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in Health Care Management. She made the transition into law enforcement to further her passion and purpose of serving others while also challenging herself. She hopes to spend the remainder of her career with the Bell Gardens Police Department and one day earn a spot in the Special Investigations Unit.



EXTENDING USEFULNESS OF POLICE VEHICLES

When the Bell Gardens Police Department needed to replace an aging vehicle, they researched the cost and practicality of refurbishing that vehicle, replacing and updating parts and equipment and saving public funds. After finding success in 2017 when the purchase of a new SUV was put off by renewing a city-owned Crown Victoria vehicle used by patrol, the Department is now refurbishing two other vehicles to be used by the gang detail.

The cars undergoing renewal are 2006 and 2007 models with average mileage of 75,000. The work is being done by specialists Wild Rose 911, with lighting updates being handled by Black and White Emergency Vehicles. The refurbishment includes installing re-manufactured engines and transmissions, suspension systems, steering and brakes as well as other elements to make the vehicles safe and roadworthy for police use. These measures can extend the life of a vehicle by four or five years.



PUBLIC SAFETY ENHANCED WITH NEW SERVERS

In an effort to improve the communication system at the Bell Gardens Police Department, dual servers were installed recently. The old system, which had only one dated server, was updated with new hardware that eliminated critical down time which in the past had kept officers from booking arrestees, required the expense of overtime for officers who could not access the computer system to write reports and compromised officer safety when criminal checks and prior record searches could not be made for field units.

An optimum situation involves running a "redundant" system of two servers concurrently which provides for one server taking over for the other without an interruption in service. To create this system for BGD, \$70,000 was allocated from the Department's Information Technology and Asset Forfeiture funds. Department staff is also pursuing the possibility of grant funding from the State of California's Office of Emergency Services.

PARKING CHALLENGES FOCUS OF INCREASED CITATIONS AND SURVEY

Response to the problems of parking in Bell Gardens have energized response from both the Police Department and Public Works Department.

As a result of an increased number of inquiries and concerns regarding parking, the Police Department has increased public outreach using social media and participated in discussions at, Neighborhood Watch meetings and three Parking and Traffic Town Hall meetings. The Jail Community Service Officer has been reassigned to Parking Control and the hour for Parking Enforcement Officers were adjusted to provide additional evening and weekend coverage.

Also, at the request of some council members and residents, the Police Department has adjusted its philosophy away from giving officers sole discretion whether to warn or cite offenders. These measures resulted in a 103 percent increase in the number of parking citations issued. From March 1 through May 31 2018, 2,196 parking citations were issued; for the same period in 2019, 4,454 parking citations were issued.

In Public Works, engineering staff has been directed to conduct a parking demand study in two sections of the City: the area west of Eastern Avenue, Gotham Avenue to the north, Bell Gardens Avenue to the west and Quinn Street to the south as well as the area west of Garfield Avenue, Gotham Avenue to the north, Eastern Avenue to the west and Cecilia Street to the south.

The survey will include tabulating the number of cars parked on the street versus the number of potential parking spaces; license plate verification for cars parked on the street using data available to the Police Department to determine ownership and detect out-of-town residents who park in Bell Gardens. In addition, each street segment will be evaluated to determine the actual number of available parking, explore potential parking solutions and provide cost-benefit analysis.

It is anticipated that this survey will be the basis for a comprehensive City-wide plan to improve the parking situation.



HOMELESS PROBLEM ADDRESSED WITH COMPASSION

Despite the efforts of Bell Gardens Police Department officers, the homeless and mental health communities continue to grow, resulting in quality of life issues for not only those populations, but for Bell Gardens residents and business owners as well. This county and statewide crisis has had a significant negative impact on the Police Department's personnel and resources.

From June 13, 2018 to January 1, 2019, officers responded to 317 homeless-related calls for service, 82 calls for mental health incidents and officers placed mental holds on 79 individuals. To date in 2019, BGPD's Homeless/Mental Health outreach team has worked approximately 425 total hours and contacted more than 360 individuals. Recently BGPD officers successfully placed two chronically homeless individuals into shelter and aid services.



The Homeless/Mental Health Outreach program, where law enforcement and clinicians from Los Angeles County, Bell Gardens, Huntington Park and South Gate collaborate and conduct twice-monthly outreach without taking enforcement action. They offer care packages and housing, medical care, counseling, drug rehabilitation and job skills resources from the public and private sector.

Homeless encampments can create public health and safety hazards due to the trash, human waste, fire hazards, drug use and paraphernalia, stolen property, firearms, possible parolee hideouts and incidents of theft and vandalism to surrounding businesses. There have been homeless encampment cleanups conducted by teams comprised of Bell Gardens, South Gate and Downey Police Departments, Bell Gardens and South Gate Public Works, LA County Mental Health and Athens Services. Notice is given several days before the visit, with walk-through reminders done the day before and on the day of cleanup, the team has personal interactions with each occupant and confiscates items of value that are not removed. Video records are taken before and after the cleanup.

Homelessness is an ongoing issue that is not restricted to Bell Gardens, but BGPD is dedicated to continually address the situation with innovative and compassionate strategies.