

Still the shining city on the hill?

Former Mayor Mike Henn's talk at the Speak Up Newport Dinner on February 11, 2011 stuck with me. Mayor Henn described Newport as "the Shining City on the Hill."

Yes, we heard from Mike about the City's then current and future priorities (including "generational priorities," which phrase is way beyond my pay grade), but that "Shining City" phrase is what I remember 11 years later.

That simple description bespeaks emotion, inspiration, and aspiration. Mike's vision sorta made me proud to call Newport "home."

But as I think of the town which has been a part time or fulltime home going on 68 years, I wonder if the vision is about to change.

Our Council of seven has worked collaboratively for nearly 70 years. They (all seven) debate vigorously, they (all seven) decide troublesome issues, they (all seven) put disagreements behind, they (all seven) move on to the next challenge.

I wonder – for all its perceived pluses – whether the direct election of the mayor plan will affect the thoughtful collaborative judgment by seven (former) equals. I wonder whether the "strong mayor" will overshadow the "lesser" remaining councilmembers and nullify our pre-eminent City Manager. I wonder whether we will still be "the Shining City on the Hill" after June 7.

A last thought as we prepare to cast our absentee ballots: If the direct election of the mayor is so worthwhile on its merits as contended by a proponent, why have so many prominent past and present Newport Beach Councilmembers, Mayors, Citizens of the Year, journalists, influential leaders, commission members, committee members, and committed citizens come out against the measure?

Maybe these thoughtful folks have looked at the devil in the details – not swayed by a superficial catchphrase.

Please vote "NO" on Measure B.

Paul K. Watkins

Newport Beach