

*ALBERT P. ARIZMENDEZ MOMENT IN REDONDO BEACH HISTORY*

## THE REDONDO BEACH CHARTER

On April 29, 1892, following a favorable vote of the people (177 to 10) and approval of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Redondo Beach was incorporated as a California sixth class general law city. At that time general law cities were divided into six classes, based upon population at the time of incorporation. As described in Henning's 1921 General Laws of California, which includes the California Municipal Code, a city of the sixth class has a population of 3,000 or less at the time of incorporation; fifth class – more than 3,000, but less than 10,000; fourth class – more than 10,000, but less than 15,000; third class – more than 15,000, but less than 30,000; second class – more than 30,000, but less than 100,000; and first class – more than 100,000.

Cities are general law cities are bound by California's general law provisions, including conducting municipal affairs. In contrast, charter cities, allowed by the California Constitution, have supreme authority over "municipal affairs." The governing document for charter cities is the city charter, adopted by the residents of the city and ratified by the California legislature. In essence, being a charter city gives local control to the city; more specifically and generally, a city ordinance that regulates a municipal affair will control over state general law. As reported by the League of California Cities, of California's 478 cities, 108 are charter cities.

There are 88 cities in Los Angeles County as of 2020, only seven were incorporated prior to Redondo Beach, which remains the oldest incorporated city in the South Bay.

For over forty years, Redondo Beach operated as a class six general law city. However, in the 1928 election for City trustees, the Redondo Advancement League slate of candidates who advocated, as part of their platform, the adoption of a charter. One of the platform candidates, May B. Hopkins was elected as trustee, and subsequently was elected by her fellow trustees as the President of the Board of Trustees. In both newspaper articles and in minutes she was called Mayor Hopkins.

In fact, Ms. Hopkins was Redondo Beach's first female Mayor. She had previously served as City Treasurer since 1916. She was also the first, and possibly only mayor recalled by a vote of the public. In 1931, 1670 votes were cast recalling her. The issue of a city charter played a role in the recall election. Mayor

Hopkins considered the promise for a charter election as one of her pledges during her 1928 trustee campaign. However, she was not able to get the rest of the Board of Trustees to call for the election of freeholders to draw up the charter. By mid-November 1930, a recall petition of Mayor Hopkins had been filed with over 800 signatures and the recall election scheduled. By January 1931, Mayor Hopkins was no longer on the Board of Trustees.

In the run-up to the recall, an October 31, 1930 article explained the need for a charter “with its present population and its sixth-class status it is not possible to have a real executive office. If the city had fifteen thousand or more population a satisfactory form of government might be established under the general laws, of California; but without that population our only method is by charter.” As noted in the article, contrary to popular thought at the time, having a charter did not mean having a city manager as the executive of the city. Rather, the article noted that the first step in the process would be to elect fifteen freeholders to draw up the charter. Those individuals would determine “whether the executive would be a mayor, a manager, or something else.”

The article went on to explain the process: first, elect the fifteen freeholders who will draft the charter; second, ratify the charter by the people; third, ratify the charter by the California legislature; and fourth, elect the officers under the charter.

By July 1932, a petition for a charter election was filed with 800 names, which resulted in an August 15 election for the fifteen freeholders to draft the proposed charter. Only owners of land in fee and purchasers of land under written agreement are qualified to sign the petition. Fourteen men and one woman filed papers with the Clerk seeking election. Once elected, the board selected Mrs. Katherine M. Turner to serve as chairperson. A draft charter was proposed for voter review and ratification on February 21, 1933. The proposed charter provisions included: the election of council-people by ward (district), rather than at large, which was the then existing method of election; the mayor would no longer be elected from among the trustee, but would be elected at large by the citizens, giving them a direct say in who was mayor; the mayor would have veto power, but no vote; terms would be two years, as opposed to four which was in place at the time; the school boards (for the collective Redondo grammar schools) would increase to five members (up from three), elected by wards, with four year terms, and have their elections at the same time as the council; and the Grant School District would be absorbed into the Redondo School District. Despite efforts to

educate the public through neighborhood information meetings and support of the local newspaper, the charter adoption was defeated 1359-1421. Based upon the precinct reports, most of the opposition came from South Redondo. Interesting the repeal of the prohibition liquor ordinances was on the same ballot and won handily.

Shortly after the election a new community organization was formed to continue to advance the efforts for Redondo Beach to adopt the drafted proposed charter. Eli J. Dessery, the proclaimed president of the Charter Organization announced the founding of the Municipal Charter Organization. In 1934, the New Deal Association, headed by Don McCarthy, were successful in getting enough signatures on a petition and another election on the ballot for the fifteen freeholders who would be empowered to draft the charter. That election was on April 9, 1934. Two of the original New Deal officers were subsequently elected to the city council. One, Floyd Roberts, became Mayor that same year. The April 9, 1934 election also resulted in the election of fifteen freeholders to draw up a charter, two were women. At the first meeting, William T. Thompson was elected as head of the Board. As an aside, Frank L. Perry was elected as a freeholder; less than a month later he was appointed as City Attorney.

On September 28, 1934, in a special election, Redondo residents ratified the charter proposal by a vote of 1110 to 634. Upon the California legislature's ratification in 1935, Redondo Beach became a charter city. On April 8, 1935, fifteen City officials and school board members were elected under the charter. John L. McClain was elected the first Mayor directly by the people of Redondo Beach. Frank L. Perry was elected City Attorney; C.C. Mangold was elected City Clerk; and George H. Anderson was elected City Treasurer. This was also the first election that councilmembers were elected by ward, not city-wide. Of further note, it was reported that the voter turnout as measured by case ballots, was almost 75%.

In May 1948, Mayor Charles Wortham requested that a city manager form of government be included in a new city charter, later stating that the 1935 charter was outdated and cumbersome. The Redondo Beach City Council approved paying former City Attorney William F. McFadden \$1,500 to draft the new charter and instructed the new City Attorney Maynard Henry to work with McFadden. A month prior, Manhattan Beach resident overwhelmingly adopted a city manager form of government. Generally, under a city manager system, the city manager is the administrative head of the city, appoints all department heads and is

responsible for their performance. The council selects the city manager and can remove the same. This frees up the council to devote its energy to policy making and law making.

In September 1948, McFadden presented a new charter to the City Council to study. This was followed by a review and analysis of a Citizens' Charter Commission, composed of one member each from a number of local organizations, suggested 29 changes to the McFadden draft. In November 1948, the City Council adopted 26 of these changes and set the charter election for January 4, 1949. The new charter was approved by a vote of 1413 in favor and 620 against. The new charter was ratified by the California legislature on January 21, 1949.

The 1949 charter is still in effect today. As noted in the charter itself, it has been amended multiple times:

4/10/51

4/12/55

4/9/57

4/13/65

4/11/67

12/3/70

4/10/73

4/15/75

4/19/77

6/6/78

11/4/80

11/2/82

3/8/83

6/5/84

11/6/84

3/5/85

6/3/86

3/7/89

3/5/91

3/2/93

3/7/95

3/4/97

3/6/01

11/4/08

11/4/14

6/7/16

*Compiled by Ron Maroko*

Sources: Redondo Beach Official Charter, Redondo Beach Reflex, Henning's General Laws of California, Fun, Frustration and Fulfilment by Ken Johnson, Information from the nonpartisan League of California Cities, Wikipedia (list of cities in Los Angeles County)