

City Council Reports On Town Hall Meetings

By Lucinda Scott

"You were the Black, the Brown, the Yellow and the White; you were the rich, the poor, the young, the old. 'You are East Palo Alto.'"

Mayor Barbara Mouton

East Palo Alto made history July 1, 1983 when it became a city."

"This was the first time in modern history," said Mayor Mouton, "that citizens of a newly incorporated city have had the opportunity and the responsibility for designing their own city." The task of planned and shaping the destiny of the city was undertaken in Town Hall Meetings held three consecutive Saturdays, Sept. 10th, 17th, and 24th.

Consultant Victor James, hired by the city to coordinate the meetings, made a Preliminary Report entitled "Phase I," at the City Council Meeting last Monday. The purpose of the first meeting Sept. 10th was to provide an open-ended discussion on the city government's role and responsibilities. Citizens developed a "laundry list" of community needs, issues, and problems. At the Sept. 17th seminar, the list was organized according to issue areas.

The Preliminary Report showed the commitment, creative ability, sensitivity, and energy residents have and are willing to use in developing their city. At the conclusion of the report council members voiced their approval of the report. Council member Satterwhite recommended adding a section on Human Services. He also proposed that the Council start scheduling meetings to begin citizen participation in city

government.

The issue areas were grouped into four categories: policies/ordinances, government/citizen relations, services/programs, and police department structure. At the last meeting, Sept. 24th, participants reviewed the recommendations made at the two previous meetings. In this "brainstorming" session, residents identified different structures that will develop and promote citizen involvement in the planning and decision-making process. Session topics were: General Government, Public Relations, Public Works, Public Safety, Community Planning/Development, and Community Services.

General government recommendations included: developing employment opportunities, citizens voting on proposed tax increases, the accountability of elected officials; low interest home improvement loans, and an aggressive effort to recruit Black policemen. Residents also voiced their concern about citizen participation in government, budgeted funds for investments, and the development of city-owned public utilities.

Participants' suggestions for insuring public Safety included traffic and noise control, the elimination of burglary, gambling, and drug trafficking, and the enactment of curfew and truancy laws. Some of the Community Planning and Develop suggestions were: that the city acquire and open the old Nairobi Shopping Center, establishing a cultural/business center, encouraging construction of low income housing; creating city-owned lending institutions, and developing a major hotel and convention center.