

**Q1: Ben Bartlett, you were just elected to City Council (District 3), so what's up with you? and the new Council?**

A1: Well, I'm here and super excited. In the first six weeks, I've been ramping up, learning a lot, and getting in tune with my District. Already, I've had an opportunity to address pressing problems. One involved an afternoon-long mediation involving neighbors and a local business. It was not easy, but they came to terms. We also shut down an illegal massage parlor. There have been complaints about this place for years. We got it done in two weeks.

**Q2: Since your election, you've been outspoken about homelessness and housing. Say more about the big picture.**

A2: For me, it's all about positive outcomes for the entire community. The challenge here is figuring out how to use resources to magnify hyper-local outcomes. Currently, the City is facing two crises: homelessness and housing. First, I support the creation of a Homeless Czar – some people hate that term, but I love it. I also support the creation of shelters and a quadrupling of shelter beds. That's why I'm behind the Step Up Housing Initiative, a quick and efficient way of providing 100 dwelling units on an existing City property. That would address roughly 10 percent of our current homeless population. The units would be leased and base rent would be \$1,000 monthly, paid for by the tenant and partnering non-profits committed to getting these people back on their feet. It's about extending the circle of prosperity. I simply don't accept poverty.

**Q3: And what about housing?**

A3: We have to address the lack of housing for students and young adults, because this shortage is impacting permanent residents. As more and more Cal

students move into South Berkeley, more and more elders are being displaced. I call it the "silver tsunami." One solution is ADUs [accessory dwelling units], and I would like to see the addition of 1700 units this year. How? By making it easier and faster to permit and build them. Again, it's about leveraging local resources, so that more people can afford to age in place. Frankly, a 17-year wait list for senior housing is not acceptable. So, my objective is to remove obstacles, so that more lives are positively affected – right here, right now.

**Q4: At last Monday's MLK Community Breakfast, you announced the "Bindex" [pronounced BEN-dex]. What's that?**

A4: [Laugh] Bindex is short for "Berkeley Inclusion In Opportunity Index." It's a budget referral item that would review how the City is spending its dollars. Consistent with the City's values, there should be diversity among the ownership of enterprises the City is working with. It's common sense: a budget should reflect the values of the organization – in this case, the City of Berkeley.

**Q5: Is there anything else that you'd like to say to readers?**

A5: Enough with all the talk about crisis. Waiting time is over. Consistent with the spirit of my campaign, it's time for results and outcomes. I have commissioner seats available, and I know that I'm living in a community of rarified geniuses. Currently, I'm looking for people with ideas and vision. We're in this together. All doors open.

**Q6: What's the best way readers can contact you?**

A6: By calling my office, (510) 981-7130, or by sending an email to [bbartlett@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:bbartlett@cityofberkeley.info)

At a regular session held in Council Chambers on Tuesday, January 24 – the first session of the new year, Mayor Jesse Arreguin rapped the gavel enthusiastically to open the meeting at 7 p.m. Much later in the evening, just before 11:50 p.m., he rapped the gavel again to end it. And he seemed just as enthusiastic.

And though the new Council may be more deliberate in the conduct of its business, it demonstrated a remarkable willingness to negotiate and compromise while discussing items on the dais. In the final tally, most (if not all) of its decisions were unanimous.

More specifically, during this session, Council voted unanimously to: eliminate the two-square foot sidewalk regulation; for a referral item for Staff to consider eliminating the 2-hour parking zone near the dog run in Ohlone Park; for a referral item for Staff to consider ways of ending the City's banking relationship with Wells Fargo due to its ongoing support of the Dakota pipeline construction project; and to increase fees for Echo Lake Youth Camp by 6.5 percent.

The Council also voted unanimously in support of the City's short-term rental policy as well as two additional related ordinances that clarify this policy, dovetail the ordinance language with the existing policies of the Rent Stabilization Board, and offer definitions of accessory buildings. But that's not all. After a thorough and detailed report by Staff, and then after much discussion and negotiation and compromise, Council voted unanimously to revise the City's General Fund Reserve Policy. With this decision, the City will be increasing its reserves from current levels, 8 percent, to "stability" level, or 16.7 percent, which roughly equates to two months of operating revenues, by the end of the current budget cycle. At the same time, Council also decided to implement a ten-year plan to increase the General Fund Reserve up to "catastrophic" level, or 30 percent.

The purpose of the increased reserves is to mitigate a variety of risks that Staff had carefully analyzed. After the Staff report, the Mayor requested the comments of City Auditor Ann Marie Hogan,



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*Who commented that the Staff had*

done excellent work, and that she fully supported their recommendations. She also reminded Council of the purpose of increasing City reserves.

"With the new administration, we know that cuts in federal funding are coming. Now is the time we need to make decisions that will allow us to navigate the rocky road ahead," Hogan said.

During the discussion, Council negotiated many of the details. After Councilmember Sophie Hahn (District 5), who had proposed the ordinance, agreed to a series of "friendly amendments" suggested by Councilmembers Maio, Wengraf, Droste, and Davila, it seemed obvious that the item would be supported. That's when Councilmember Kriss Worthington (District 7) chimed in.

"I'm just happy about tonight's session...I've been pushing for increasing reserves for nine years, and now it looks like Berkeley is finally going to have a General Fund Reserve Policy."

Indeed, the vote was unanimous.

Not everything was accomplished, however. Dur-

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Consent Calendar, Councilmember Ben Bartlett (District 3) continued his item, the "Step Up Housing" Initiative, until the regular session scheduled on February 14.

During ceremonial items, Arreguin declared Dorothy & Bob Bryant as artists of the month and presented them with a Proclamation. Then he somberly announced that the meeting would be adjourned in memory of many great members of the community: former Chief of Police Daschel Butler; Houston Smith, Cal professor of Religious Studies; Emily Inman, an educator who was Berkeley's first homicide victim of 2017; Allen Strauss, a photographer and dedicated City commissioner; and two homeless persons: Laura Jodwin and an unidentified male, who perished recently while living on Berkeley streets.

Compassionate words about homelessness were offered by Hahn. Then Vice Mayor Linda Maio (District 1) read a letter from the sister of Laura Jodwin. At Maio's reading and final remarks, Councilmember Cheryl Davila

(District 2) led all in  
a moment of  
silence.

