



**COUNCILMEMBER
JUAN OROZCO**

An update from the desk of Councilmember Juan Orozco

As I start my fifth year as councilmember for the City of Ukiah, I'm reminded — when reflecting on the progress I've been a part of since I was first elected — how important it is that Latinos serve on city councils. It's important in general, but especially in Ukiah, where a little more than a third of our residents are Hispanic or Latino.

I'm proud to have this leadership role, to be able to work so that the city feels more open and responsive to minority communities. This kind of representation makes a real difference.

Since my election, we've had Latino residents tell us that they feel more comfortable applying for city jobs, which is hugely gratifying. Ensuring that more Latinos have experience in local government has been my top priority, because Latino populations (in both Ukiah and California) are growing to the point where they'll soon become majorities; they need experience in government. We must continue to encourage our Latino residents to seek administrative and elected positions, and to take an interest in our city government more broadly.

With that in mind, our city council has made diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) a focus of all the work we do, and we've seen real progress as a result. We established an 11-member Diversity and Equity Standing Committee and tasked it with the development of an Equity Action Plan. The committee (which I serve on) meets every month to track progress on the goals we outlined in the plan, which include identifying and dismantling common employment barriers, creating a mentorship program, and establishing regular DEI training.



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The committee also acts as a sounding board and point of connection for the community's questions and concerns. Basically, we want to make DEI an essential part of the policy-making, accountability, and delivery of city services. For example, our city's latest labor contracts included a 5% pay increase for bilingual employees, creating a financial

incentive for better diversity among the city's workforce while helping Ukiah to provide more city services in Spanish. You can find more information on available city jobs [here](#).

In addition to DEI, here are some of my other areas of focus for the City:

Leadership on water: Although we have our own consistent supply, the city has initiated discussions with other local communities and water utilities to help ensure a more sustainable and reliable water supply throughout the Ukiah Valley. There are important discussions underway regarding the potential consolidation of adjacent water districts with the city's, as well as what to do after PG&E ceases operations at Potter Valley. We need a long-term solution for management of the Potter Valley Project to ensure a stable and sustainable water supply for the upper Russian River.

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Building more housing and addressing homelessness: Because Ukiah sees a disproportionate amount of homelessness as compared to the rest of Mendocino County, I'd like to lessen this problem in the short-term and be a part of finding a solution for the long-term. Managing encampments and other temporary living arrangements is a major pull on city resources, and we need more cooperation from the county to address this.

Regionally approved by voters in 2017, a portion of sales tax revenue in the county funds mental health services and new facilities. We're in the process of building multiple facilities throughout the county, the largest of which (a 16-bed psychiatric building) will be in Ukiah and is scheduled to open in about two years.

And as a city, we've reformed our approach to housing, creating a housing trust fund and streamlining zoning laws to incentivize the construction of more affordable and middle-income housing. The Ukiah Senior Apartments and the Acorn Valley Project are products of this new approach, which should continue to improve housing affordability by bringing supply more in line with demand.

Going more green: I'm proud that a lot of Ukiah's electricity already comes from green sources, but we have room to add more. Our hydroelectric plant is a great resource. It couldn't operate during extreme drought years because there wasn't enough flow from Lake Mendocino, but it's operating now and has the capacity to generate up to 10% of the city's electric load. This is infrastructure that Ukiah owns, and an example of the kind of resource that as a city we should prioritize.



In the meantime, the city's electric utility offers rebates to help residents and businesses upgrade to more energy-efficient equipment, from dishwashers and refrigerators to industrial lighting and commercial HVAC systems. You can find more information on those rebates [here](#). Last year, Ukiah provided more than \$25,000 in rebates for qualified energy efficiency projects, and the program resulted in about 80,000 kWh in energy savings. That's the average daily energy use for 4,000 homes!

On these topics and others, I hope you'll share with me — and our other city councilmembers — your thoughts, questions, or concerns. We and Ukiah as a whole will benefit from your continued input and engagement.

I can be reached at 707-463-6217 and at jorozco@cityofukiah.com. I'll hope to see you around the City soon.