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Spanish Language Translation Services Now Offered at City Council Meetings



Spanish-language translator Adelaida Haven working a recent Perris City Council meeting.

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The City of Perris is employing a translator to enable residents attending City Council meetings to hear the proceedings in real time in Spanish.

Translator Adelaida Haven began duties during the Oct. 10 City Council meeting. Haven's previous experience includes translating as a court interpreter and teaching Spanish to high-school and university students.

Haven said she appreciates the City reaching out to accommodate residents with limited English-language skills. Language barriers often can lead residents feeling intimidated and unwilling to address public officials with concerns.

"People feel lost," she said. "They don't know where to turn. Hearing the meeting allows them to feel involved in their community."

The translator service allows residents wishing to hear City Council meetings in Spanish. Residents can check in with the City Clerk prior to the start of proceedings and check out an assistive hearing device. The device comes with an earpiece, but residents can use their own headphones or earbuds if they wish. They will need to leave a piece of identification or some other form of collateral that shows their identity and address to ensure that the device is returned at the conclusion of the meeting.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and members of the City Council see hiring a translator as a way to further connect with many Perris residents who speak Spanish as their first language. He said he has received social media inquiries questioning why the City has no Spanish-speaking service during public meetings.

"Many non-English speakers would love to voice their concerns but they feel intimidated," Vargas said, pointing out that Perris has a population of more than 70 percent Hispanic. "This initiative allows them to get a sense of involvement with our City. I'm hoping we get more public engagement as a result."

Mayor Pro-Tem David Starr Rabb said translation-services "gets the information out so people know what's going on in their community."

"It helps residents with access to the City and to local government, which impacts people most directly," he said. "It demonstrates our commitment to be a more inclusive and welcoming City."

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke called the interpreter-at-council "another large outreach effort to engage our entire community."

"We want our community to be aware of all the activities and events that we offer," Burke said.

City Councilman Malcolm Corona said that public inclusion of Perris residents is one of the major objectives of elected representatives and municipal administrators.

"It's important to get as much information as possible out to as many residents as possible," Corona said. "That makes for a more engaged community."

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers called the interpreter initiative "a wonderful program that allows us to reach more of our residents."

"It offers them a way to become more engaged," Rogers said.

Spanish-language broadcasts of Perris City Council meetings will be shown on Channel 3 for Time Warner Cable subscribers following the live meeting at 7 a.m. Sunday, 9 p.m. Wednesday and 8 p.m. Friday. Residents can also view the meetings on the City's website at www.cityofperris.org.



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