

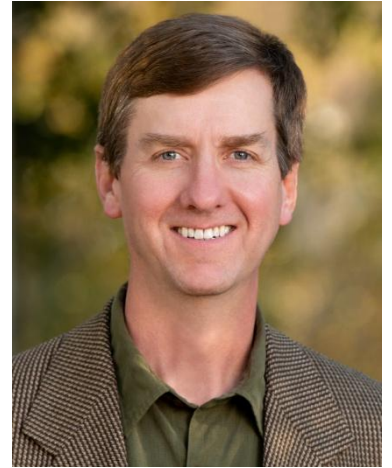
The Inside Scoop

October, 2026

Dear District 3 Resident,

It's Peter De Hoff, your City Council Representative for Poway's District 3. This monthly-ish newsletter is how I keep you posted on what's happening in your city government.

This issue covers traffic-related updates, some thoughts on the future of development in Poway and how we fight for local control, an analysis of what the AI data center ban actually does, and the final phase of our biggest water project. I'm holding the automated license plate reader (ALPR) review for the next issue, since this one is already long enough.

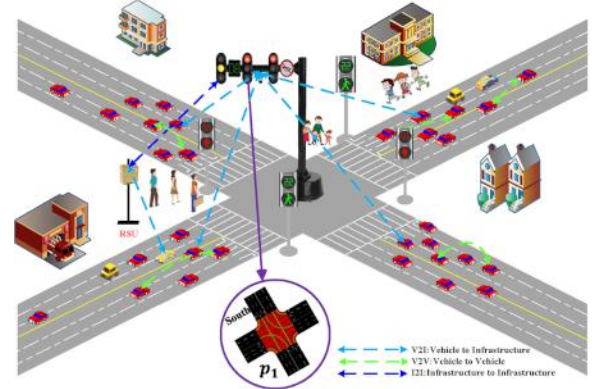


Traffic Updates

This week brought a pair of big meetings on traffic and traffic safety.

Smarter signals on Espola Road

First up was a progress report on the advanced adaptive traffic signal technology that was just installed on the Espola Road corridor. These signals learn traffic patterns over time and work to reduce the number of red lights anyone encounters. They've been shown in multiple other municipalities to cut overall wait times.



Most of the traffic increase we've seen in Poway comes from outside the city, from places like Ramona, which has grown explosively over the last several years. We can't control that growth, but we still have to deal with its impacts. Since we won't be widening our roads, these signals are the best tool we have.

After questioning the presenting consultant who is setting up the program, it became clear to me that while we need this system to work, getting there won't be easy. As complex as it is, calibrating the hardware looks like the easy part: getting the road sensors working and keeping the software from being confused by tree shadows. The bigger challenge appears to be about training the system in general and especially on side street access, and that's where we all need to help each other.

If you run into a problem, note the following:

- The street, lane, & intersection you were in
- The direction you were headed
- What the issue was

Then forward it to tbeach@poway.org. She has direct, real-time access to the signals.

For example: *Espola Rd. northbound at Del Poniente, left turn lane, 10:50 AM Monday, October 19th. Light took 3 minutes to change, and nobody was coming southbound on Espola. Cars on the west side street were waiting.*

Once the learning phase is done on Espola, Poway Road is next.

Citywide speed analysis and traffic safety

Poway just completed its latest citywide traffic speed analysis, a review required every five to 14 years. The Traffic Safety Committee (TSC) reviewed the report and made its recommendations for Council approval. Thanks to a recent change in state law, the City now has more flexibility and doesn't have to raise speed limits in certain circumstances.

That matters because, under the old rules, a study showing people speeding near a school could force the city to raise the limit, the opposite of what improves safety. I've long suspected that's part of why those studies weren't pursued more often.

The results this year were significant. About 10 stretches of road will see limits drop by 5 to 10 mph, including in front of Twin Peaks Middle School, where a student was struck by a car earlier this year. The lower limit should help make that corridor safer.



One person spoke at the meeting, raising concerns about distracted driving. Captain McMasters of the Poway Sheriff's Station said public awareness is the most effective tool for reducing distracted driving, and the department will put out some PSAs in the near future. Unfortunately, if someone isn't paying attention, it doesn't matter what the speed limit or stop signs say.

The Captain also reported 26 tickets for unsafe driving on the first day of school at Twin Peaks Middle School and Poway High School. This reflects a more proactive posture on enforcing safe driving around schools. None of those tickets were for speeding.

How to get safety concerns addressed

Here's something many residents don't realize: traffic safety signage can be approved directly by the TSC, without a neighborhood petition. That said, traffic calming changes still go through the TSC after a neighborhood petition, and then to City Council for approval.

[Email me](#) if you have questions about the process and I can point you in the right direction.

The next TSC meeting is **October 14th at 4 PM** in the City Council chambers at City Hall.

The Harbinger on Carriage Road

At the September 15th council meeting, the public finally learned something that had been kept from them by state law. Not by accident. By Sacramento's design. An SB 1211 project is going up along Carriage Road. It's exempt from Poway's parking requirements, and nobody got a say in it.

SB 1211 is a state mandate signed into law in 2024 that took effect in 2025. It allows up to eight ADUs to be dropped into the parking lots of existing multifamily properties like apartment complexes. It prohibits considering parking requirements, removes avenues for public notice and hearings, and doesn't even require proximity to mass transit. With insufficient onsite parking, those cars will get pushed onto Carriage, Buckley, and Morene Roads. There is no appeal for this new two-story complex. Sacramento made sure of that.



As bad as that is, it isn't the part that should worry you most.

This is the *first time* a developer with real ties to Poway has skipped the City Council and gone straight to Sacramento. Before this, only outsiders tried that route, and most of them failed. To perhaps understand why he skipped the council, you have to go back to 2024.

That year also marked the first time in the city's history that Poway voters elected two candidates running on hardline, *de facto* anti-development platforms. That message resonates for real reasons, and the frustration behind it is understandable. But since 2017, Sacramento has dealt itself a powerful hand, and it now sits at the table between the city and the developer, offering deals more profitable than anything a city can muster. Developers know this. For them, time is money and discretion is uncertainty; Sacramento slashes one and eliminates the other. The local process can still work, getting a developer close enough to what they want without the community backlash. But it's a risky bet. It takes three votes to move a project forward, but the developer needs to believe in a ceiling of five to even start down that road.

Here, the developer did everything needed to get his property ready for SB 1211 before the 2025 start date, then waited more than five months after the new council was seated. Was he waiting to see which would win out when campaign promises and state law conflicted? However unique their path to office, the new councilmembers did what every councilmember before them has done: they voted the way they said they would. With the possibility of five votes gone and the ceiling now capped at three, the timing suggests that risk calculation stopped penciling out. The developer pulled the trigger on May 19th, 2025, skipping the council and starting the SB 1211 process.

The developer didn't come before council to explain himself. Or let anyone know why. He didn't have to. No announcement, no confrontation. Just the knowing silence that comes with the ministerial approval process of the "Sacramento Special."

It wasn't always this way. Before 2024, everyone could count on the council voting in accordance with state law, and developers could believe they would get a fair hearing.

Harmon Ranch is the clearest example, warts and all, of what the old process produced when five votes were feasibly on the table. The General Plan allowed 59 two-story single-family homes on that Oak Knoll site, with fully captured internal parking, about as tight as Poway's rules permitted and a big change from the empty field that had been there for the last 70 years. The Sacramento Special would have allowed 90 three-story, lot-line townhomes, with kitchen exhaust venting into neighbors' backyards, and excess parking pushed onto Oak Knoll Road.

The developers believed they had a real shot at five votes, so they entered the long process: public notice, public input, multiple rounds of revision. What came out the other end was 63 two-story single-family homes with fully captured parking, a picnic area, and a trail that will eventually lead out to Poway Road. In exchange, the lots were slightly smaller than under the General Plan, and the developers sold fewer homes than the 90 they'd sought. What they gave up in total profit, they gained in margin and goodwill.

The deal came in at about 7 percent over the General Plan, compared with an increase of more than 50 percent for the Sacramento Special. It passed 4-1, one more vote than needed. It was the last example of Poway's system working the way it was designed to, preserving local control.

What's happening on Carriage Road is about more than one project. It's a harbinger. This local developer has shown the thought process and paved the path for everyone else: the other apartment complexes on Carriage, Oak Knoll, and Poway Roads, and the multifamily properties scattered throughout the city. For them, what used to be a vague option is now real, concrete, and de-risked. There are members of the council who will always be ready to deal in the defense of local control, but will developers still want to come to the table?

The AI Data Center Ban: What Actually Happened

Few topics drew as much online and email commentary this month as Poway's new ban on AI data centers. So, I was surprised when the item came before Council and not a single member of the public came to speak. I thought I had a good read on what brings people to chambers, and I was clearly wrong.

The feedback that reached me beforehand was excellent, though, and some of it was detailed and well thought out. Opinion was split roughly 50:50 between banning the activity outright and regulating it properly.

For me, the driving concern was land use, and one question in particular: What happens when an application with a use profile that fits none of our existing regulatory boxes lands on our doorstep and is grandfathered in before we can build a framework to handle its true impacts? It's not pretty.

In fact, on the very night we started this process, the City Council in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, had to reverse course on its data center moratorium because a developer filed an application before the new rules took effect ([MPR News](#)).

Poway has seen something like this before. The first of our two Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) appeared to fit an existing warehouse-type classification, which meant it bypassed the discretionary review we're supposed to apply in the business park. Development Services then mounted an all-hands-on-deck effort to craft the needed safety regulations on the fly, and those rules became the gold standard for the County and State to follow.

The result was top notch, but writing policy on the fly is far from ideal. Among other problems, it cuts the public out of the process, and it pulls Development Services staff away from their state-mandated duties and timelines.

That same bandwidth limit is holding up the review of the Poway Road Specific Plan (PRSP), which Councilmember Maeda initiated about 16 months ago. That review is so large and complex that the city is in the process of hiring a new city planner for Development Services to increase the bandwidth to take it on, a drawn-out and consequential process with long-term financial implications.

For the same reason, the staff bandwidth needed to complete and pass a thoughtful framework for third-party AI data centers, in time to beat a potential application, simply isn't there. Given that, the most prudent course was to preclude the use until a date uncertain.

The complication was making sure the ban didn't ensnare legitimate high-compute activities already underway in our business park, particularly among our defense and critical-industry



tenants. So, the ban was carefully and narrowly tailored to target the specific use patterns and characteristics of data centers that sit outside of the norm for the park.

Before the meeting, I reviewed ordinances from several other cities and counties. Some had clearly missed this point. In others, I could read between the lines of their staff trying, not always successfully, to keep their councils from throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Our goal was to ensure that any new ordinance protected the vibrancy of the South Poway Business Park, a major economic and jobs engine for the city. So far, it looks to be working.

The proposal from Mayor Vaus and Councilmember Edmondson was a well-considered effort to build on past lessons and steer the city around a potential land use landmine, and it passed unanimously.



Water Resiliency: Phase Three Begins

Without much fanfare, Poway has begun the third and final phase of the largest water infrastructure project in the city's history, which is currently on time and on budget. This is a big deal. This phase will improve our water source resiliency by adding an interconnection with Ramona, giving us a redundant source of treated water for the times we need to take the water treatment plant offline for maintenance. The plan is to use that same interconnection with Ramona to sell treated water from Poway to the Ramona Municipal Water District, which will help reduce the upward pressure on *our* rates.

This whole process was set in motion before I was elected to the City Council in 2022, and before the precautionary boil-water alert many of us remember. Looking back, it's worth appreciating just how bold that Council decision was. The Council at that time chose to undertake a massive infrastructure improvement project to close a potential future safety gap in a water system with a flawless operating record.

Only one current Council member who made that original decision is still serving today. When I reflect on that, I often ask myself: if I'd been on Council back then, facing a system with a perfect track record, would I have had the foresight and the political will to launch a massive proactive project against a hypothetical structural weakness? I can't honestly say that I know the answer.

Staying Out of the Ring

If you've been reading my newsletters and commentary on Sacramento's housing mandates, you may have come away thinking there's nothing we can do, or that Poway simply "rolls over" whenever a new mandate or court ruling comes down the pike, or whenever a developer utters the phrase "density bonus." Nothing could be further from the truth.

With each important new law or court ruling, the city does a detailed analysis of what it does and does not mean and, just as important, what is realistically enforceable given the cost to the parties. Those factors shape any negotiation, and because of their nuance, are rarely discussed in open session.



Understandably, that apparent silence leads some people to push the city to take an ostensibly stronger position and "fight" in court or engage in lawfare. I've seen this online from many, and I heard a version of it from my opponent at the recent Chamber of Commerce Council Candidates Forum. (To be clear, I've met Bob Walder and he strikes me as a reasonable and likable person. Our differences come down to policy and relevant experience.) People who take the "we should sue" position often point to a handful of legal "successes" in other cities. But those successes are exceptionally narrow in scope, and they almost always come from charter cities. Poway is a general law city and lacks any similar legal advantages. And even when a charter city gets a provisional win, the state usually closes that loophole in the next legislative session, as it did with SB 450, which took effect in 2025.

The "fight, fight, fight" approach also leads cities down a well-trodden legal path, and the results are stark, with Huntington Beach being the poster child for this approach. After countless lawsuits in this arena, nearly all of which ended in losses, that city is out millions of dollars in fines and court costs. It now has a structural deficit of more than \$15 million. Its most recent budget process required a full bankruptcy feasibility analysis, a far cry from the routine financial review most cities go through. That city is now looking into ways to monetize its name and brand to help cover the shortfall.

These righteous legal fights let politicians beat their chests in a way that plays well to their base. But the chest they're beating is paid for with the taxpayer dollar, which is then hand-delivered into the pockets of opposing lawyers.

That doesn't mean Poway has never pushed back. We've had numerous successful challenges to Sacramento's mandates, mostly in dealing with state administrative agencies, which have institutional incentives to over-interpret the rules coming from the Legislature. I've said clearly in open session that we need to take a stronger stand in the true gray areas, and that position doesn't change based on the room I'm in. None of those challenges required a lawsuit. They were resolved through the legal maneuvering and negotiation Poway engages in with the state on a regular basis.

The SB 1211 project I wrote about above shows the same approach applied to a developer. The developer kicked things off in mid-May but appears to have interpreted the new rules too

broadly, which drew pushback and stalled the application. Even with no public hearing, staff still enforces the rules as written. The developer came back the following September with a compliant version, and it moved forward.

Poway does fight for local control. But stepping into the ring for a slugfest with an 800-pound gorilla is a sure way to get flattened. Fighting to win means fighting smart. We don't turn it into a contest with the state over who's stronger. We win by staying out of the ring.

Get your sign before it's too late!

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to my reelection effort for the District 3 City Council seat. I'm grateful for the support.

I've been out knocking doors and meeting with folks in small groups, and a number of you have asked for yard signs. If you'd like to join them and show your support for keeping Poway on the right path, let me know and I'll get one out to you in a spot that works for your property. Contact me at peter@peter4poway.com. Producing signs and walk pieces takes real resources, so if you're able to help support that effort, please click the contribute button below.



Endorsed by the Poway Firefighters Association and the San Diego County Deputy Sheriffs' Association.

Find your District here:

<https://poway.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=0feab6db015e43deb3de19e4d9466237>

My ask of you: Remember to vote in November, spread the word to your neighbors and friends in District 3, and, if you're able, make a contribution today. Every yard sign, walk piece, and mailer that reaches doors in District 3 depends on people like you stepping up.

Can I count on you?

CONTRIBUTE

<https://www.efundraisingconnections.com/c/DeHoffforPowayCityCouncil>



Either way, thank you for reading, for caring about this city, and for being the reason Poway stays Poway.

I want to hear from you about what interests you most to see in future newsletters. Your input will help shape future updates.

Thank you for taking the time to stay informed and engaged. Together, we can continue making Poway a great place to live.

Sincerely,

Peter De Hoff

Poway District 3 City Council Representative

SPAM filter blocking this newsletter? Email me for back issues.

Want to add someone to the list? Let me know their contact information.

Question or concern regarding governance issues in Poway? Email me at pdehoff@poway.org

Any other question: Email me at peter@peter4poway.com

Don't want to get this newsletter anymore? Reply "unsubscribe" and I'll remove your email.

Paid for by De Hoff for Poway City Council District 3, 2026

FPPC #: 1492464