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Children in charge in Yuba City



(L to R) "Mayor" Ella Steel, "Councilmember" Simran Thorat, and "Councilmember" Ashley Morello listen to a presentation at the mock City Council meeting, Thursday, June 22.

By Rachel Rosenbaum/rosenbaum@appealdemocrat.com | Updated 2 weeks ago

A new Yuba City City Council approved the construction of a new recreation facility, a music festival to pay for it and changes to school suspension protocol.

This council wasn't made up of the usual members. It was a council of students from the Yuba City Unified School District taking part in the second Summer at City Hall program.

Eleven students spent three weeks of their summer vacation seeing how officials run the city

and its programs, and shadowed various job opportunities.

“It’s a personal passion, and I’ve always wanted to do something like this,” said Vice Mayor Preet Didbal, who spearheaded the creation of the program, modeled after one in Sacramento.

Students spent time at the police department dispatch center, the wastewater treatment plant, going on ride-a-longs with the fire department, and met with local businesses.

During the mock City Council meeting Thursday, students presented proposals, council asked questions, and members of the public also shared their thoughts before a vote was made.

The hypothetical proposals included a 55,000-square-foot recreation center at Wilbur and B streets across the way from Gauche Aquatic Park. The project would cost about \$18 million, and funding options included grants, a bond sale, unallocated reserves, and money from a fundraiser.

The fundraiser came in the proposal of “Boogie in the Buttes,” a music festival proposed to be held at “Regional Park” (made up for the proposal).

Another student presented a proposal for a change in schools’ suspension procedures. Instead of going home for the day, students should spend the time doing community service in beautification work like planting flowers and trees, and picking up trash, she said. Funding would be needed to provide lunch, snacks and water, and to employ a part-time position to supervise students and offer mentoring during breaks.

All the proposals were approved unanimously.

Students sound off

Jocelyn Flores said she didn’t realize how significant local government was.

“(The program) brought up issues maybe youth doesn’t know about,” Flores said Thursday.

For example, she said, she got to see two different sides of an argument when it came to the Sutter Pointe development.

Damon Gill acted as the city manager and said organization is the key to success.

“Seeing how the city manager runs the show... he’s like a conductor,” Gill said.

Gill also spent time with Development Services Director Arnoldo Rodriguez, with whom he shadowed on negotiations.

“I did it just for fun, to learn about the community and how it works,” he said.

Josette Soto got to shadow a public defender at the Sutter County Superior Courthouse, and met local Assemblyman James Gallagher, who talked about having a voice in the community.

“There’s a lot more going on behind-the-scenes,” she said.

Ashley Morello said she and her peers think of Yuba City as a sleepy town with not much to do. But Summer at City Hall opened her eyes to all the area has to offer.

“I didn’t realize so much goes on,” Morello said. “Yuba City is a lot bigger than I thought it was.”

“Mayor” Ella Steel said the program also opened her eyes to local government.

“I learned a lot about the intricate workings in a city and how hard it is to keep it running,” she said.

Didbal said the program offers not only insight into how a city and its government works, but also provides job shadowing for students to consider while getting closer to graduating from high school. She hopes the program can one day be a regional effort, and not just for YCUSD students.

“It’s really important for our youth to see that and open those career opportunities they never thought existed,” Didbal said. “We all have an opportunity to make a difference in our community, at whatever level you want.”

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