

*A Conversation With . . .*

## **Sustainable City Commission Chair Daryl Supernaw**



Daryl Supernaw, chair of the Long Beach Sustainable City Commission and longtime resident, put years of effort into the Atherton Street ditch project, which began in 2008. Phase II of the project, which runs from Palo Verde and McNab avenues, is underway and expected to be completed by January 2010. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

■ By **TIFFANY RIDER**  
Staff Writer

**D**aryl Supernaw doesn't mind that he's referred to as "ditch boy." In fact, he wears the name with pride since he has spent years helping transform the Atherton Ditch into something safer and more visually appealing for the community. Today, Supernaw heads the Sustainable City Commission in Long Beach, but his passion to spearhead change began long ago.

Born at Harriman Jones Hospital (once adjacent to Bixby Park), Supernaw never ventured outside of Long Beach. He grew up in the Los Altos neighborhood and has been a 4th District resident for the past 30 years.

"I attended Wilson High School, Long Beach City College (LBCC) and Cal State Long Beach," he says, noting he received a bachelor's degree in telecommunications and film and a master's degree in education and instructional media.

Supernaw attended the first Earth Day in 1971 while an LBCC student: his concern for the environment and overlooked causes started in the heyday of hippies and world peace.

So his transition to current chair of the sustainable commission is not only fitting but also seemingly necessary for the activist who combined education, dedication and common sense to rally support for what would be a major undertaking.

That undertaking goes back more than three decades. Following a major flood in the mid-'70s, Supernaw's father – a Long Beach firefighter at Station 22, located at Atherton Street and Palo Verde Avenue – snapped some photos of the overflowing Atherton Ditch.

Such floods had occurred long before Supernaw moved to the neighborhood in 1979. Over the years, he became increasingly aware of problems associated with the Atherton Ditch – trash, large debris, graffiti, even an occasional car getting stuck in the trench. He also knew that the ditch along Stearns Street had been



August and is expected to be completed by January 10, 2010.

Success with the project ignited Supernaw's drive to volunteer as chair of the sustainable commission, a group that makes advisory policy recommendations to the city council on issues relating to the environment. It also serves as a forum for community discussion on environmental issues outlined in the commission's Sustainable City Action Plan.

"In creating the plan, the commission and the city's office of sustainability spent over a year collecting information from every city department, scrutinizing the data received and developing specific, quantifiable objectives," Supernaw says. "We delivered an action plan to council in the form of a comprehensive, 36-page framework detailing the city's environmental concerns."

covered in the '70s, which represented a possible solution.

He began documenting these issues and, in 2006, formed the Atherton Ditch Adjacent Neighborhood Association to initiate what he considered to be much-needed change. (The group will soon be called the Atherton Corridor Neighborhood Association.)

"Atherton became a whole different street, with the Pyramid and the Carpenter Center," Supernaw says. "We were kind of out there in the boonies for a while; then we moved to the big city without ever moving. Suddenly, Atherton was a more high-profile street in Long Beach.

"I thought of all the visitors to the Carpenter Center coming to campus, and this was their view of Long Beach – this ditch. It did not send the right message."

Supernaw urged the Long Beach City Council to get the Atherton Ditch covered. He eventually partnered with 4th District Councilmember Patrick O'Donnell.

"As a community member working on the Atherton Ditch, the city has given me incredible access to every department and individual involved in the project," he says. "I have attended pre-construction meetings and worked directly with engineering, water, outside contractors, council staff and public works field inspectors throughout the process."

There are two phases of the project, both of which include storm drain improvements, covering up the ditch and landscaping the area with low-maintenance plants and trees. Phase I covers the ditch between Knoxville and Hackett avenues on Atherton Street. Totalling nearly \$1.5 million, this phase began on June 28, 2008 and was completed on December 8, 2008.

Phase II, currently under construction, includes the ditch between Palo Verde and McNab avenues. Construction of the second phase, which also totals nearly \$1.5 million, started this



Supernaw says the plan provides guidelines and measurable goals that will help Long Beach become a leader in sustainability. The plan covers every aspect of the environment, from water use to park upgrades, and includes the framework for a "green" report card that will track sustainability upgrades and projects.

The term "sustainability" often accompanies environmental initiatives, but what does it mean?

The commission has not defined the word yet, but Supernaw says a sustainable city should incorporate "green" development to meet both present and future needs. He notes that the city can't move ahead

without implementing the Sustainable City Action Plan.

"We really don't have a choice in the matter," he says. "We either implement sustainable environmental, economic and social policies, or the city will collapse under its own weight."

Through research, Supernaw has discovered that systemic improvements are needed all over the city.

"To me, the most compelling argument for environmental change is a child with asthma coughing in the night," Supernaw

says. "That's all the convincing I need."

Looking into the future, he hopes the city will make what he sees as the only choice.

"The right thing and sustainable thing to do is fix the problem at its source, and I remain optimistic we will meet that challenge," he says.

For more information on the Atherton Ditch, visit [www.atherton-ditch.com](http://www.atherton-ditch.com). To review the commission's Sustainable City Action Plan, visit [www.longbeach.gov/citymanager/sustainability/sustainable\\_city\\_plan.asp](http://www.longbeach.gov/citymanager/sustainability/sustainable_city_plan.asp). ■