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STRIVING FOR JOURNALISTIC EXCELLENCE IN LOCAL NEWS

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Violent Fight at West Covina City Hall Injures Residents, No Arrest Made by West Covina Police

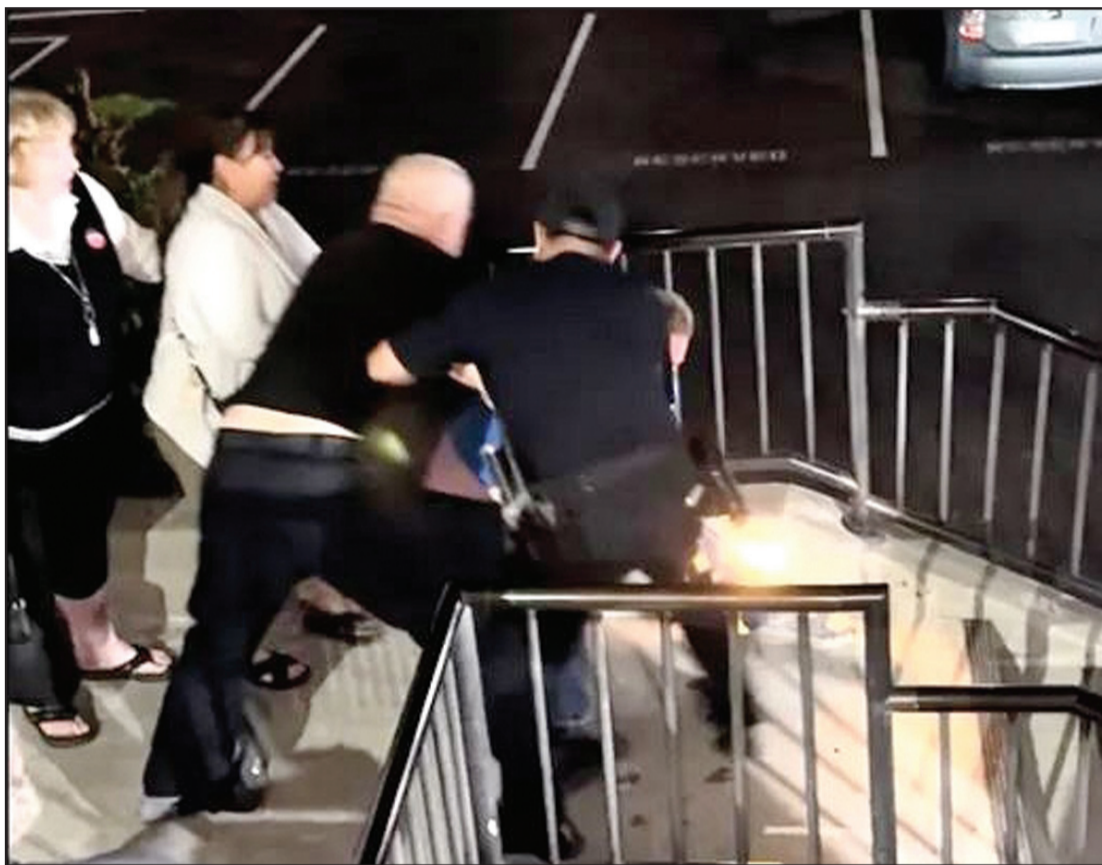
By George Ogden

WEST COVINA - An all-out brawl after a West Covina Planning Commission meeting left two residents injured, requiring hospitalization. The Planning Commission meeting took place Tuesday, Oct. 22, at City Hall.

This all started after a Planning Commission meeting where a number of residents had called out Planning Commissioner Brian Gutierrez about statements and comments he made that they felt were straight out lies. Gutierrez, who is the chair of the Planning Commission and a city council candidate, had made comments that he did not attend a candidates' forum because he was called out to help people in the disaster. However, a few hours before the candidate's forum, it was reported that he was talking to a group of people at Merrill Gardens about a mile away from the forum site. Bill Elliott, the husband of West Covina Councilwoman Rosario Diaz, defended Gutierrez and called out the forum organizers as being partisan.

This may be where the altercation started from. On the way out of the Planning Commission chambers, two groups of people started to go down the side stairs. Councilwoman Rosario Diaz and Bill Elliott went down first, and they headed out to the parking lot. A larger group which consisted of Steve Bennett, John Shewmaker and Sherry Berillon, with about 6 other people behind them got to the landing area on the stair when Sherry started making comments to Elliott. Elliott turned around near the bottom of the stairs and made comments back to Sherry in a "colorful fashion" where Bennett decided to record the confrontation on his phone because of Elliott's alleged violent history. Others also started using their phones to record what was going on.

According to witnesses and videos taken from the scene, Elliott came up the stairs as he didn't want to be recorded. When



A West Covina police officer breaks up a fight between Bill Elliott, the husband of West Covina Councilwoman Rosario Diaz and Steve Bennett, a candidate for the Covina-Valley Unified School District at City Hall on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024. (Screenshot of video courtesy of Mario Sobalvarro)

he got to the landing, he grabbed Bennett's phone. At the same time, Elliott allegedly punched Bennett in the head with his left hand then started punching Bennett in the face with his right hand. This caused Bennett to go down on his hands and knees. Witnesses added that Shoemaker, who was standing a couple of steps up from the landing stepped down and tried to separate the two of them. He was trying to become a peacemaker only to find himself allegedly getting punched out by Diaz and then taking an elbow in the face by Elliott breaking his glasses on his face and cutting the bridge of his nose.

When a West Covina police officer arrived, he got Elliott off Bennett. Sherry Berillon, who was trying to pull back Diaz from getting involved was then turned on by Elliott who took a backhanded swing at her saying "get your hands off my wife". He then pointed his finger at her and said, "get your hands off my wife" and about that time Diaz stopped Elliott from doing anything else

to Sherry Berillon.

All three victims wanted to press charges and demanded that the two perpetrators, Diaz and Elliott, be arrested. The officer recovered Bennett's phone from Elliott and returned it to Bennett who later on found out that it had been damaged and not operating properly. The police refused to take any kind of report as the three of them wanted to file arrest reports right then and there. The police told Elliott and his wife to go down the stairs. Elliott turned towards Bennett and allegedly threatened him by pointing his finger at him and said this isn't over, he took two more steps and turned back around and pointed and said the same thing to Sherry.

Both Bennett and Shoemaker ended up in the hospital and were released the next day. Shoemaker ended up back in the hospital with a possible stroke. He stayed in the hospital for two days before he was released.

The victims and many of the witnesses are calling foul, be-

cause the police did not make any arrests and they're saying there's a conflict of interest because the Police Officers Association apparently has supported and en-



Steve Bennett, candidate for the Covina-Valley Unified School Board, shows injuries he suffered in a fight against Bill Elliott, the husband of West Covina Councilwoman Rosario Diaz.

dorsed Rosario Diaz.

John Shewmaker is running against Rosario Diaz for the District 3 City Council seat. Steve Bennett is a candidate for Covina-Valley School Board.

Sherry Berillon has reported to the police that Bill Elliott is now stalking her. According to Berillon, Elliot drove really slow down the street and stopped in front of her house and just sat there staring into the house and she was looking out the door to see who it was until she realized it was Elliot. This scared her and she called people to come to help her. However, he started to drive off slowly. She called the police to have somebody come out or call her back about this incident. They never came out to take the report, nor did they even bother to call her back. Scared, she went to the Police Department in person to file a report and then from there she went to the Sheriff's Department.

They requested the bodycam footage of the officer that was trying to break up the fight. It appears that the police are withholding this evidence, according to the victims. Bennett also produced his recording and gave it to the police but not until he had made copies to give to the Sheriff's Department and the DA's office as well as attorneys.

"The West Covina Police De-

partment responded to an incident last night," City Manager Paulina Morales said Wednesday in a statement. "The incident is under investigation. At this time, we have no further comment."