

Profile in Public Service: Alpine Councilwoman Angela Bermudez

Angela Bermudez is an example of the hundreds of hard-working, dedicated city officials serving small cities in Texas. We think it is important to profile these public servants from time to time.

Will you please share a little bit about yourself?

I was born and raised in Alpine, Texas, and with the exception of a six-week move to New Mexico, have spent my life here. My husband Ernesto and I have three daughters. Our oldest daughter, Perla, is an optometrist in Alpine. Darla, our middle daughter who is a pharmacy technician, has given us three beautiful granddaughters. And our youngest daughter, Sonya, has also given us three beautiful grandchildren – all on the same day! She has triplets, two boys and one girl.

I graduated from Sul Ross State University with a bachelor's degree in education and a minor in Spanish. I taught for one year, and then took a job with Southwestern Bell as a long distance telephone operator. I later got a job with my alma mater as a mail service supervisor. I've worked for Sul Ross State University for 35 years to enjoy my years left as a councilwoman.

Believe it or not, my main hobby is being a councilwoman. I have served for nearly five years on the Alpine City Council. I call it a hobby because it is so much fun. Some believe it is a thankless job, but I think differently because people are always telling me "thank you" and "job well done." Along with serving my city, I love to read and spend time with my family.

Why did you first become involved in your city's government, and what motivates you to stay involved?

I got involved with city government because of my councilman. He would share his experiences with me, and sometimes ask for my advice. He was finishing his third term, and made it sound interesting, so I thought, "Why not? It is time for me to serve my city!" I have not regretted this decision. I have learned so much, and have met so many interesting people. I hope that whoever takes my place enjoys it as much as I have. The main reason I stayed involved and ran the following two terms was that I felt (and feel) there's still work to be done in our city. I wanted to be a part of the group that makes decisions for the betterment of Alpine. I don't know what I will be doing with my time once May 2015 comes around. I will have to keep attending council meetings, make my wishes known, and stay informed about what is being done to improve our city.

You've been attending TML training workshops for a while. Can you share Your TMLI experience with us?

I remember the evening that I heard the news I was elected to serve as a councilwoman – I was totally shocked! But at my very first TMLI workshop, I knew I was going to be all right. So much information was provided, things that I may not have ever considered. Not only did I learn from the presentations, but also from other councilmembers, mayors, and city managers in attendance. I quickly realized that Alpine wasn't the only city with sewer, water, street, and finance challenges. The TMLI workshops provide ideas for fixing some of these problems.

How would you describe a typical work day or week to people who might not be familiar with what you do?

I usually start my week by visiting the city office. Here is where I check my email, mail, and phone calls from constituents, our city manager, and other wards. Generally, I try to figure out the issue or answer the question on my own. I always try to get back with people the next day with an answer, or to let them know I'm working on their issue.

After that, I read past meeting minutes; TML's monthly magazine, *Texas Town & City*; ordinances; and the city charter – all information on past and present items on what the city law dictates – and of course; city budgets and financial reports.

Late afternoon, while there is still light, my husband and I will go for what we call "a cruise" to look around my ward. We look to see where there is trash or, as I often find, running water due to a leak. I then report any issues the next day. The next few days are often similar to this.

If I plan to put an item on the next week's agenda, that will mean a little extra studying. I talk to constituents about how they feel, and ask if they have ideas to give me. I'll also go to the city office and talk to the city manager for information. Then I read past minutes and magazines, and sometimes call TML for advice.

On Friday, I prepare for my presentation for the following Tuesday's meeting. Late Friday, council receives the black book containing the agenda and all the materials for the meeting. Looking at the black book tells me if I will need to study over the weekend. Saturday and Sunday is time for my family and me, unless I get an emergency call from a constituent. On Monday, I go by the city office to see if anything has happened that I need to be aware of, and then Tuesday, I go over my presentation before the 6:00 p.m. meeting that will hopefully end by 9:00 p.m. Wednesday starts another two to three weeks of the same process. All of this is really interesting and exciting to me.

What is the City of Alpine's most pressing issue or greatest challenge?

The most pressing issue in the City of Alpine is our sewer system. We need to start fixing this as soon as possible. I learned that in order to fix the infrastructure in our city, we have to encounter debt. There are people who say that it is a great amount of money, but we need to find solutions to be able to pay this debt. For example, annexation will bring in more taxes and might just keep the council from raising

taxes to complete the sewer project. A better sewer system will attract more people to build businesses or homes, which mean more sales taxes and city taxes for Alpine.

What advice can you offer someone new to this position?

There are a few things. When it comes time to vote on an agenda item, vote for what your constituents want. But if you feel what your constituents want is wrong, go with your heart. After all, your constituents voted for you because they trust you. I'd also suggest attending as many TMLI training events as you can. You will learn from the instructors and from other elected officials that attend. Remember that most cities have the same problems, and they will gladly help you. It is also important that you study your agendas. Do not just attend your council meeting thinking you know it all, and do not need to study and prepare. But most of all, remember that the outcome of a vote, even if you do not win, will give you a good feeling and will show your constituents that you are interested in the city!

I want to thank TML for all their hard work teaching elected officials. Most of all, I want to thank all the people in Alpine, Texas, for helping to make our city what it is. Thank you! ★

