

# CITY WATCH

*An Insider Look At City Hall*

March 8, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 5

## CITY WATCH

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## CITY WATCH

City Watch Mission: To promote grassroots civic engagement through information and ideas.

City Watch is distributed to Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils representing more than 3,000,000 stakeholders.

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City Watch is published electronically on Monday of every other week. Share it with your Neighborhood Council and other activists.

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**We welcome your comments**

### Budget in Crisis

## Cultural Affairs Dept Among Budget Cuts Being Considered by Mayor

By Ken Draper

Push is coming to shove in the City's budget process. With deadlines looming, suppositions about possible cuts are taking on the look of certainty. The result of reality setting in is shock waves among some of the City's departments and those parts of the community affected.

By week's end, word was spreading that the Mayor's budget team was recommending the elimination of the Cultural Affairs Department, at least as it is presently constituted. Some of its programs and responsibilities could be merged with other departments, say Parks and Recreation.

The budget team's work is still in the early-on stages, but the Mayor's budget overseer, Doane Liu, says that the first-to-go list could include LAPD's drug abuse program (DARE), meals for the homebound, summer jobs for at-risk kids and one of the City's public-access TV stations.

*Continued on Page 5. See "Budget Cuts"*

### Grapevine

## As Promised: Budget Axe Coming Down

Mr. Insider

The talk at City Hall this week was all about the Mayor's proposed budget. The proposal is not slated to be released until April 20, but word is that City departments were given briefings by the Mayor's budget staff. A number of dazed-looking General Managers could be seen wandering the halls of City Hall Thursday and Friday, fresh.

The long-discussed consolidation of five small human and social service-related departments made its way into the budget. So did the elimination of several other small departments, apparently, including Cultural Affairs and Environmental Affairs.

*Continued on Page 5. See "Grapevine"*

## NC's on Brink of Victory in DWP Rate Battle

By Ken Draper

It appears that Neighborhood Councils and the Department of Water and Power have moved a step closer to NC inclusion in the DWP planning process. Such an agreement would certainly be considered by many, a victory for the NC system. It also would let the DWP off the hook with the Commerce Committee who castigated them for lack of Neighborhood Council outreach and pushed for some guarantee that would prevent it from happening in the future.

A committee of Neighborhood Council representatives will now meet with DWP officials, including CEO Gerald Gewe, to hammer out a plan for including NC's in future policy making. This initial planning session should occur within ten days.

*Continued on Page 5. See "Victory"*

Insight**For NC's: The Days of Whine and Roses**

By Harris K. Telemacher

A friend of mine once told me that the sun never sets on the election season. This is particularly true if one tries to follow the election antics of the 80 neighborhood councils. While some of the NC's are going about the business of holding their first board election, many others are conducting second elections. In the process, some original board members are standing for reelection and, to their shock and surprise, they are getting defeated.

Coastal San Pedro was the first NC to conduct an election. They were also the first to have its officers stand for reelection. And thus, were the first to have a Neighborhood Council incumbent defeated.

**Voters by the Busload**

There were other surprises. In a couple of elections, stakeholders brought people down to cast ballots literally by the busload. In Westchester, for example, workers at the nearby Playa Vista Project were allegedly offered food and drink after construction workers went and cast their ballot for a slate of candidates.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment's position is that that is the way democracy works. Candidates need to turn out their voters. Defeated incumbents are out-organized. Others, usually the losers, cry foul and come to the City Council to try and change the election rules. Out organized, or out of touch, the losers blame their defeat on outsiders who have taken over their NC, with no sense of their own responsibility.

*Continued on Page 6. See "Whine and Roses"*

PERSPECTIVES**Holding NC's/Organizers Accountable**

By Ken Draper

How long should a certified Neighborhood Council be allowed to go before holding its first election? Should there be a minimum limit put on the number of stakeholders that vote for an election to be validated? Should there be standards set for NC outreach to its stakeholders? Questions the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, the Education and Neighborhoods Committee and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment should, if they aren't already, be wrestling with.

According to a recent DONE report, 62 of the 81 certified Neighborhood Councils have held at least one election. Of those certified councils, 11 took, or are taking, more than six months to hold their first election. More significant, 27 (44%) failed to get at least 200 voters to the polls. Fewer than the number of petition signers required for certification. Clearly, a number of Neighborhood Councils have either abandoned, or are simply failing at, the outreach programs they promised to implement in order to be certified.

**NC's Failing at Outreach**

East Hollywood activist, Jim McQuiston, offered up some advice on this subject at the February 25 BONC meeting. He's looked at the stats and he's not happy. McQuiston sees these small election turnouts and election delays as "the failure of Neighborhood Councils in their outreach responsibilities" and out of compliance "with the Charter."

*Continued on Page 6. See "Perspectives"*

**Quotables**

*"This is truly a victory ...  
and a testament to what  
can occur when  
Neighborhood Councils  
band together."*

-Jim Alger  
(See Page 1)

*"For every problem  
council, I will estimate  
that there are ten times  
that number ...  
functioning the way ...  
their stakeholders  
envisioned they would."*

- BONC President, Ron Stone  
(See Page 2)

*"One remedy is for the  
Board to invalidate any  
election that fails to attain  
a voting population  
... of 200."*

-Jim McQuiston  
(See previous Column)

## A Conversation with BONC's Ron Stone

# State of the NC System: Strong and Very Exciting

(June of this year will mark five years since voters overwhelmingly approved the new Los Angeles City Charter, which provided the mandate for Neighborhood Councils. A little over two years ago, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners certified the first Neighborhood Council, Wilmington. This seemed an ideal time to sit with the **President of the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, Ron Stone**, and evaluate the state of the NC system. Here is **Part One** of that conversation.)

**City Watch:** Commissioner Stone, the new Charter is now five years old. The first certified Neighborhood Council is a little more than two years old. The system has taken some hits recently from some disgruntled folks unhappy with election procedures, stakeholder definitions and what they perceive to be lack of support from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. On the other hand, 32 councils have risen as one voice against the proposed DWP rate increase and there are numerous councils around the city quietly, and successfully, going about the business of giving voice to their neighborhoods. What is the state of the Neighborhood Council System?

**President Stone:** Well, simply put, I would say that the state of Neighborhood Councils is strong and exciting. I have heard City Council member Janice Hahn say that Neighborhood Councils are not an experiment. So, I would agree, we're past the experiment stage. I would say we have support from all over the city. The Mayor, the City Council, the Controller, the City Attorney. Given that, I think we're in a very exciting and strong time.

**CW:** With 81 councils certified, are we where you imagined we would be by this point in time?

**President Stone:** I don't remember there being a target number when we started two years ago. I would say it's a great number. A large percentage of the city is now covered by Neighborhood Councils. I would say we're right on target.

**CW:** What are you doing about filling the remaining wholes?

**President Stone:** There are some areas, Pacific Palisades for example, who don't feel they want to deal with the conditions of being a council. There are other areas, the Westside where I am for example, who, I believe, are about ready to submit an application. I would rather have the department working on the areas that want to be certified. I believe that as more and more Neighborhood Councils flex their muscles and get the ear of elected officials, then people on the outside of the system will want to be in. That's our goal.

*Continued on Page 7. See "Ron Stone"*

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Comments & Views Welcome

### City for Sale?

## Welcome to McPolitics at LA's Drive-thru City Hall

By H.L.T.

New York is doing it so why don't we? That is the question being asked by Eric Garcetti and some other Council members hoping to hit a vein of gold and solve our budget crises by selling licensing rights to commercial products. Did you know that Snapple is the official drink of New York City?

Selling licensing rights is not new to the Southern California mind set. The 1986 Olympics were almost entirely paid for by the official sponsors. The City of Santa Monica owns the rights to the neon Santa Monica Pier sign and collects a royalty whenever it is used for a commercial purpose. The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce owns the rights to the Hollywood sign.

Right now there are probably terminally hip ad execs thinking up products that they would like to associate with LA. How about Ray Bans, the official sunglasses of sunny LA. Or BMW, the official convertible; or McDonalds, the official drive thru, or BeautyRest sponsoring parks or bus benches.

The other possibility would be to sell naming rights. Staples paid a lot of money to have the basketball arena called the Staples Center. Imagine the money the city could make, without raising taxes, if we had the Disney City Hall, Smith and Wesson Police headquarter or the Depends Senior Center.

Why wait for the council to sell off the rights to public spaces? Neighborhood Councils could start right away. Coppertone could sponsor the Venice NC. Westchester might approach United Airlines. The Spearmint Rhino Valley, The Gallo Port, the City Watch Clock Tower, Gold's Gym and Silver Lake. Lysol or Airwick could sponsor a neighborhood next to Sunshine Canyon landfill.

*What are your ideas for good matches between products and communities or landmarks? Help resolve LA's budget crisis. Send us an email with your ideas to: [Sirken323@aol.com](mailto:Sirken323@aol.com).*

(My apologies if I offended any community, either by commission or omission.) ■

Tracking Issues (I-Trac)***Ban on Pay-to-Play, No on Marriage Amendment, Brief Break for Urban Farmers***

**Commissioners:** In an effort to halt what some members felt was, at the least, the perception of corruption, the City Council approved the so-called "Pay-for-Play" ordinance, banning LA's 350-plus commissioners from raising campaign funds for elected local officials.

Some said the new law could radically change city government. Others felt it didn't go far enough. The Mayor called it a "significant first step."

**Same-Sex Marriage:** Just a month after passing a resolution to oppose the Patriot Act, the City Council voted to oppose President George Bush's call for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage or "any proposal that would enshrine in the United States Constitution discrimination against people based on their sexuality or choice of life partner."

At least one Neighborhood Council has passed a similar motion.

**Urban Farmers:** Superior Court Judge, David Yaffe, granted a temporary restraining order after attorneys for the South Central urban farmers sued the property owner and the City. At issue is the 14-acre garden at 41<sup>st</sup> and Alameda, farmed for 12 years by urban farmers and their families.

The order halted, at least temporarily, demolition efforts that attorney's said were started ahead of deadline. Warehouses and storage facilities are scheduled to replace the thriving gardens. The conflict developed after the landowner asked for, and was granted by the courts, his property back, claiming the City was not using it for the purpose stated when they used eminent domain to acquire it. All parties are due in court on **March 16**.

Some South Central Neighborhood Councils have been involved in efforts to resolve the farmer's dilemma.

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**Motions to watch:**

**#02-2763** DWP report to the Commerce, Energy Committee on status of Tree Planting Program

**#04-0407** Ludlow-Reyes motion asking for an interim control ordinance regulating the issuance of permits to automotive-related businesses (e.g. body shops, dismantling yards, junk yards).

**#04-0408** Zine-Smith motion asking the DOT to come up with a "Commuter Gas Price Relief" program to temporarily suspend passenger fares for all public transportation services when unleaded gas prices go above \$2.00. (Transportation Committee)

*Continued next column*

Citywide Alliance**Baca to Make Case for His 1/2-Cent Public Safety Tax**

Unable to coax enough funding out of the tight LA County budget, Sheriff Lee Baca decided to take his case to the public. He's promoting a 1/2-cent, so called, Public Safety Tax initiative for this November's ballot.

The Sheriff has already made his way to some Neighborhood Councils looking for support and help with signatures. He will make his case again at the March 27 **Citywide Alliance** meeting in a dialogue with NC representatives.

Tired of pulling drug dealers and gang bangers off the street and then watching them exit jail early, for what the Sheriff says are too few dollars to keep the jail doors closed, LAPD Chief, William Bratton, has endorsed the tax plan.

In addition to Baca, the Alliance playbill includes Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa; Assistant City Clerk, Frank Martinez (Election Procedures); and, Jim Alger (spearheaded the Neighborhood opposition to the DWP proposed rate hike).

**Citywide Alliance Forum: March 27 (9:30 am – 1 pm) in the Faculty Center, Los Angeles City College. For directions to LACC and to parking, visit [www.allncs.org](http://www.allncs.org).** □

*Continued from previous column*

**#04-0391** Motion asking for the review of LAPD policy on shooting at moving vehicles by LAPD, Police Commission and others. (Public Safety Committee)

**#04-0389** Ludlow-Zine request for feasibility report on developing a permanent temporary worker pool of City employees for use by all city departments. (Personnel Committee)

**#04-0002-S45** Miscikowski motion to support SB 1152, and any other legislation, that requires retail ammunition sellers to record and retain information on the buyer, including the buyer's ID number, signature and thumb print. (Public Safety Committee) □

**City Watch Issues DayPlanner**

*Because many City Council members are in Washington D.C. for the National League of Cities, the DayPlanner is running a bit light this week. However, there are a couple of dates worth noting:*

**Tuesday, March 9 (9:30 am)**-LA City Ethics Commission (Mayor Hahn's commissioner fundraising proposal; Councilman LaBonge' motion to require consultants and fundraisers to attend CEC Campaign Finance Training; Neighborhood Council disclosure of gifts and donations.

**Friday, March 12 (10 am)**- City Council

**Wednesday, March 17 (8:30 am)**- Arts for LA Meeting regarding possibly cutting Cultural Affairs Department from the city budget. (CAAM Conference Center, 600 State Drive, Exposition Park.)

**Saturday, March 27 (9:30 am)** – Citywide Alliance at LACC. □

## Budget Cuts – Continued from Page 1

It's a given that five of the City's social service departments will be consolidated. A thousand city jobs could be dropped through outright cuts, early retirement and attrition.

### Further Cuts Certain

Further cuts in less significant, from a cost point of view, programs is certain, according to insiders, providing even greater delays in neighborhood services like sidewalk repair, problem property inspections, tree trimming and street repair.

According to the Mayor's office, the City faces a \$350-million shortfall in the upcoming budget year that begins this July 1. The talk and the warnings have permeated city-talk for months. But now, as the possibilities begin to transition into probabilities, the halls of the City have taken on a darker shade of grim. ▣

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## Grapevine Continued from Page 1

Still to be seen is how the Council reacts to the Mayor's strong message. Some had wondered if Hahn was serious when he promised to implement a form of zero-based budgeting, which he has dubbed "priority based budgeting," in which budget dollars are allocated according to priority rather than trying to spread money around as has been done in the past.

The guess here is that the City Council will bend to community pressure and try to restore at least partial funding to the departments being consolidated or eliminated. The most interesting question is whether the Council will push for fee increases to make up the difference in the budget.

### Hahn Will Veto New Taxes

Mayor Hahn has sent strong signals that he will veto any new taxes. Going into an election year any such move could prove politically costly to him. However, if the Council proposes the increases and overrides his veto, the political damage to Hahn may be minimal, especially considering that at least one of his opponents will be coming from the City Council.

One area where the Council could look to increase tax revenue is in trash fees for residential dwellings. Currently the best deal in the City, homeowners pay only about a third of the true cost of their trash disposal. Increasing rates to their true value could raise almost \$100 million, cutting the expected budget hole nearly by half, but could be political poison for any politician proposing the idea. ▣

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## Victory – Continued from Page 1

As one participant pointed out, an across-the-table advisory relationship of this kind would be precedent-setting, for both city agencies and the Neighborhood Council system, and could refine further the Charter's requirement that city agencies receive NC input prior to making decisions.

Jim Alger, Northridge West President and self-styled point man for the water rate hike opposition, called it "a great day for Neighborhood Councils." And noted, "a victory has been won ... we should all be proud."

### 32 Councils Opposed

According to Alger, 32 Neighborhood Councils have voted to oppose DWP's proposed rate increase. Two have voted to support, at least in part, the DWP.

The biggest issues with the opposition have been the late effort by the DWP to include NC's in the process ... as the Charter requires ... and the number of unanswered questions on subjects like the proposed multi-million heliport in Granada Hills, the DWP claim that no rate increases would be forthcoming when requesting a pay increase last year or the probable 4% - 6% third year increase that has yet to surface publicly.

### Will Affect Everyone

"The DWP has not been forthcoming on the true impact (of the rate increase) to the community," says Alger, "the true impact of this increase will affect everyone from a homeowner in the Valley to an apartment owner in Mid City to a restaurant on the West Side."

Alger is looking for NC representatives to serve on the Planning Committee and assist in formulating a policy for including Neighborhood Councils in future DWP decisions. "While this is not everything we want, it is certainly a step in the right direction," he argues. "This is truly a victory ... and a testament to what can occur when Neighborhood Councils band together. In the end, no matter what else happens, we will have succeeded in forcing change in the process ... and, in doing so, making Neighborhood Councils relevant." ▣

**To make sure your Neighborhood Council is represented on the Planning Committee, contact Jim Alger (818.928.9001 or jim@northridgewest.com).**

## City Watch On-Line Address Book

🔗 Read City Watch- [www.allncs.org](http://www.allncs.org)

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🔗 DONE Website/links-

[www.lacityneighborhoods.com](http://www.lacityneighborhoods.com)

🔗 LA City Website- [www.lacity.org](http://www.lacity.org)

## Whine and Roses- *Continued from Page 2*

At the City Council's Education and Neighborhood Empowerment meeting recently, Council members Janice Hahn and Dennis Zine listened to testimony from individuals who claimed their elections were stolen. In an attempt to mollify the concerns of the complainers, the Committee proposed the establishment of a task force headed by Human relations Commission chair Rabbi Alan Freehling. The task force would be made up of NC presidents. His group will look at the grievance procedures for NC and DONE and possibly make some recommendations. This gesture was like a bouquet of roses to the complainers. It was an agreement to create a committee to examine a problem that might not exist.

### Limit Voting Rights

One proposal run up the flagpole, was to limit voting rights to residents only. This would prevent the rounding up of workers who don't live in the community to vote, but would directly contradict the City Charter, which states specifically that people who work in the community are stakeholders in the neighborhood.

When the charter was written it was the clear intent of the two commissions that participation in an NC should be open to any stakeholder. It was felt by the framers that the diversity of stakeholders would result in decisions that took a broader perspective into the process.

### The Most Votes Wins

In our democratic society those with the most votes win as long as they play by the rules. Not those with the loudest voice and nothing better to do with their time. Nothing prevents a Council from adopting procedural rules for elections as long as they do not violate civil rights laws. Anyway, most candidates elected on a single-issue platform, being for or against a particular development project, for example, will on other issues likely vote their own perception of what is best for the community. To the losers: Organize. ▣

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## Perspectives – *Continued from Page 2*

"One remedy," McQuiston says, is for "the Board to invalidate any election which fails to attain a voting population equal to the minimum number of (signatures) required for certification, presently 200."

Some of McQuiston's analysis may be faulty. For example, to organize a council's first election and properly promote the nomination and campaign periods, and the election itself, takes a minimum of four months. Factor in holidays and other legitimate calendar obstacles and the six-month time line no longer seems excessive.

### Second Elections

Then there's his concern about fewer voters in some second elections. In many cases, the number of candidates is fewer because the entire board is not being elected every year. This accounts for somewhat less candidate campaigning, or outreach, if you will. And, using percentages to decide what is "negligible" and what is not is to view only part of the picture. These are not organizations with million dollar election war chests and they are in a program that is just over two years in existence (the first NC was certified in December 2001). Who's to say that 500 or 1,000 votes isn't an achievement?

### Charter Mandate

However, the Charter mandate and the responsibility of the Councils is to the stakeholders and it can be argued that some degree of post-certification accountability is not unreasonable. If an organizing group can get 200 legitimate signatures for certification, why not 200 votes for the governing body that claims to speak for the people? If a council promises, at certification, to implement an outreach program, why shouldn't the BONC insist that the promise is kept?

Independence is one thing, but reneging on the Charter mandate and our word is another. We owe it to the stakeholders, whose voice we claim to represent. ▣

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**Ron Stone – Continued from Page 3**

**CW:** Now that you have a large part of the city certified, what's the focus for the Board?

**President Stone:** There is so much we need to cover ... and want to cover ... over the next several months. I don't want to put them in any particular order, but first we want our staff to work with those areas that are not yet certified. We haven't had a certification hearing in a couple of months, but I expect that to pick up. Another important goal is to make sure the department is helping the existing Neighborhood Councils. Some are struggling with election procedures. Some are struggling with personality conflicts. BONC is now involved in the election procedures. We think we owe it to councils we've certified to help them succeed.

**CW:** Are you worried that some of the frustrations that result from the Brown Act, the Conflict of Interest and public disclosure laws are chasing good people away from NC participation?

**President Stone:** The answer is yes. I am worried. We've seen individuals, some entire neighborhoods, who consider the rules burdensome. Now, parts of the Brown Act, like the open meetings, meeting postings and public comment, have to be maintained. But with some of the ethics rules, I think we need to think through how we can deal with them in a more rational way.

**CW:** Do you think there is really a chance of getting the Brown Act modified for Neighborhood Councils?

**President Stone:** I think there's a chance. I do. We're fortunate in Los Angeles that we have such a strong representation in Sacramento. We also have newly elected Assemblyman, Mark Ridley-Thomas, who is very supportive of Neighborhood Councils. The outgoing Speaker, Wessen and the new Speaker Nunez are familiar with and supportive of Councils. It will take some work on our part and some grassroots work on the part of Councils that can show folks in Sacramento what can be done.

**CW:** The Mayor's budget point man, Doane Liu, said a few weeks ago that NC funding would not be touched in the 2004-05 budget. Any sense about how safe that funding really is?

**President Stone:** I don't have any direct insight into that. I would hope that money is safe. It is a budget crisis and tough choices are going to have to be made. But, as I said before, Neighborhood Councils have the support of the Mayor. They are just getting started and I think to pull the plug now would just send the wrong message.

**CW:** Neighborhood Councils have become a part of the political culture in Los Angeles. It is rare when a City Council meeting or a Committee or Commission meeting doesn't refer to Neighborhood Councils in some way. Do you think this support for councils is genuine or superficial?

*Continued next column*

**CITY WATCH****Future Assignments**

♦ **Big Box Retail Rhubarb: What's It All About?**

♦ **Joel Wachs: What Do You Think of Us Now?**

*Stories on the City Watch*

*Assignment Board*

*The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's*

*Continued from previous column*

**President Stone:** I think this is a genuine support for Neighborhood Councils and not an attempt to control them. I think that this City Council is too smart and they understand that Neighborhood Councils represent a grassroots perspective and a broad perspective of residents and businesses in their area and they use them as grass roots sounding boards. I think that Neighborhood Councils have flexed their muscles when they weighed in on the DWP rate increase and the burglar alarm issues. Everything that I have seen is genuine support for Neighborhood Councils.

**CW:** Is it fair to say that because it makes better copy we hear more of the troubled NC's than the successful ones?

**President Stone:** I think for every one instance of a contested election or of personality in-fighting, for every problem council, I will estimate that there are ten times that number of Councils that are functioning the way we thought they would when they were certified and the way their stakeholders envisioned they would. There are certainly problems out there that need to be addressed but there are many more success stories. The unfortunate side of it is that we don't hear as much about it when things are going well.

*(Part Two of this interview with Board of Neighborhood Commissioners President, Ron Stone, will appear in the next issue of City Watch on March 22. Included will be questions on stakeholder definition, redress if you have a beef with DONE, the City Attorney's Strategic Review of NC's and Board's Van Nuys and Valley Glen decisions.)* ▣

**CITY WATCH****Publishing Dates**

**March 22, 2004**

**April 5, 2004**

**April 19, 2004**

**May 3, 2004**