

## Los Angeles Daily News

Funn with numbers at Sitty Hall

By Mariel Garza

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Every year at budget time, the Mayor's Office hands out its plan for dishing out the more than \$5 billion that Los Angeles has to spend for the upcoming year.

Well, "hands out" might be misleading, since the plan comes in two softbound volumes printed on slick glossy paper that are larger than the complete works of Stephen King. No one, except perhaps Gov. Arnold, could hand over the entire budget plan at once.

This year's mayoral budget collection is called "Funding our Priorities." Last year it was "Neighborhoods are Los Angeles." (Yes, Los Angeles is such a big and important town that we *name* our budgets. Eat your heart out, Cincinnati!)

Amid the various pictures of happy Angelenos enjoying the city's offerings, and of Mayor James Hahn interacting with those happy Angelenos (Look at me! I'm down with the peeps!), are actual charts and graphs and lines of numbers that spell out how the city's money will be mispen--, I mean spent, if the City Council approves the plan.

But because government has always embraced the theory that less is not more -- more is more, damn it, and even more is better -- there was a third budget booklet distributed this year.

This year, the mayor's budget people used a special "priority-based budgeting" formula to calculate how to dole out money. Previously, they had been using a "political pandering-based budgeting" formula, but that became unpopular after the gubernatorial recall last year.

As part of the switch, neighborhood councils were invited to submit priorities and budget requests. Many did, and their actual requests became the basis for a third and rather humorous budget booklet: the Neighborhood Council Budget Summary or, as I like to call it, Neighborhood Council B.S.

Since bureaucratic budget documents usually have all the excitement of a single Olsen twin, I expected 71 pages of boringness. Special service funds, blah, blah, blah, debt service, yada yada yada, one-time revenues ... oh, God, please take me now so I don't have to read any more.

But sometimes, just sometimes, bland bureaucrats can surprise you. I found the NCBS an enjoyable read, though it might have something to do with the creative misspellings and wacky ideas.

To preserve the integrity of the councils' messages, according to Deputy Mayor Doane Liu, every typo and error of the neighborhood council was printed as is. I'm sure the good folks at the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council appreciated that their suggestion for clearing traffic (which I believe, technically falls under the purview of the state) was not messed up by the mayor's language control freaks: "Rail Lane! No more freeway lens ("lanes," I think). Monorail down the center of 101 & 405. ... Need Mass transit from Valley into the city." Right on!

Ditto, I'm sure for the Downtown L.A. neighborhood council: "Increase the number of Los Angeles police Officers and modernize its infrastructure."

Despite the easy fun to be had over the typos and big ideas, the neighborhood council requests were earnest and illustrated both the commonalities and the inequities among the neighborhoods of the city.

While folks in Granada Hills want more cops patrolling Bee Canyon and O'Melveny parks, the Watts council would just like to have adequate park space. In Granada Hills, residents are concerned about traffic gridlock on some major streets during peak hours.

In Watts, folks are concerned with not having any place to go during peak hours. "Watts has nothing," the NC wrote in its request that the mayor make community development a priority. "No sit-down restaurants, no major retailers, no factories or plants to hire people, and no jobs."

But what was universally true of the requests was that what most communities want most and first is more police protection and crime prevention.

In response, the mayor's proposing 30 new cops this year. Not the 320 he proposed last year, not the 3,000 that crime fighters say is the minimum number of new cops needed to effectively fight crime in L.A. Just 30 -- and virtually all of them will go to the soon-to-open new police station in the north San Fernando Valley.

Too bad for Watts, and Highland Park, and North Hollywood and Crenshaw. Better luck next year.

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