

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

March 22, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 6

CITY WATCH

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CITY WATCH

We publish City Watch to promote grassroots civic engagement through information and ideas.

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We welcome your comments

DWP Rate Hike Opposition Taking Case to City Council

More than 30 NC's Preparing to Protest Increase
By Ken Draper

With the apparent support of some City Council members, Neighborhood Councils are preparing to take their case for a smaller Department of Water and Power rate increase, accompanied by a request for an independent audit, directly to City Hall. Of the 34 NC boards addressing the issue, 32 have voted to oppose the increase. And, according to opposition spearhead Jim Alger, many of those will be headed to City Council to "protest to make their point."

The DWP has proposed an 18% increase in water rates over two years (11% the first year, 7% the second) to pay for increased water system security, to further upgrade water quality and to maintain their bond rating.

Neighborhood Council opposition to the proposed increase has been mounting over the past several months for a variety of reasons. Some Councils feel that the size of the increase hasn't been justified and that the emergency status given the bond rating issue isn't supported by the facts. Others have questioned the DWP's recent salary increases and the proposed new Granada Hills heliport. One issue all of the opposing councils are united on is the belief that the DWP tried to bypass them on their way to City Council approval.

Continued on Page 5. See "Opposition"

Perspectives

Look Again. NC Glass is Half Full

By Ken Draper

Just when the pot shot mavens have you thinking the LA Neighborhood Council system is on the ropes, another dose of progress surfaces and the head clears again. That's what the Public Works' Memorandum of Understanding and the Water and Power's Letter of Intent meant to the NC system over this past week.

Neighborhood Councils have taken more than their share of hits recently. The blips, or the exceptions, on the growth chart always make better copy, so the likes of the Van Nuys meltdown or the voting dog or the half dozen board resignations feed the regional papers and the chat networks. Our own Grapevine columnist claimed that "voices" are starting to question the value of NC's and their \$50,000 annual funding. "Policy makers," he said, "do not see Neighborhood Councils as a vital part of Los Angeles government." Even usually supportive City Council members, Janice Hahn and Dennis Zine, bemoaned the number and kinds of problems NC puberty has wrought. Election glitches, boundary disputes, resignations. "We never, in our wildest dreams, imagined this," Hahn said.

Continued on Page 6. See "Perspectives"

Insight**Surviving in the City's 2004 Budgetto**

By Mark Siegel

This City's 2004/2005 budget is beginning to take form. Some department heads are finding out that their departments will fall below the ubiquitous line and be no more. This includes Environmental Affairs, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission for Children, Youth and Families and the Disabilities Commission. Their functions will be absorbed by other departments.

The city's Cultural Affairs Department was slated to be merged into Recreation and Parks. Perhaps with bitter irony, because it was a bureau in Recreation & Parks 30 years ago and was established as an independent department because a city of LA's size and importance needed an agency that promoted the arts.

Arts Community Goes Bonkers

When the Mayor's budget team informed Cultural Affairs General Manager Margie Reese that the department was to be folded into Recreation and Parks, the arts community went bonkers. Then, somewhat out of the blue, developer Eli Broad came to the Mayor with a proposal. Under his plan the city will split the functions of the Cultural Affairs Department between community arts activities and promoting the major arts institutions such as the Music Center and LACMA. The idea, though not fully fleshed out, has the Department of Recreation and Parks taking over the community arts programs. Then a new Department or Commission on steroids would be formed to raise money and link our big arts institutions with tourism.

This is reminiscent of the proposal made in 1987 by Joel Wachs when he called for the establishment of the Los Angeles Endowment for the Arts. Wachs and Mayor Bradley assembled the Los Angeles Task Force on the Arts, chaired by super developer Rob Maguire, which delivered its report to the Mayor in 1988. The primary recommendation of the Task Force was the creation of a nonprofit organization that would produce and administer an estimated \$30-million dollars in new arts funding. The source of the money would be a 1% increase of the hotel bed tax, a fee of 1% on construction costs over \$500,000 (excluding housing) and 1% of the City's own capital improvement expenditures. Most of the proposal passed. The exception was the stand alone Endowment.

Continued on Page . See "Budgetto"

Tracking the Issues (I-Trac)**Urban Farmers: One More Small Victory**

The urban farmers of South Los Angeles won one more small victory when Judge David Yaffe issued a preliminary injunction allowing them to tend their gardens at 41st and Alameda until their lawsuit against developer Ralph Horowitz is settled. The judge also suggest that the City had not followed the required process for selling the 14 acres back to Horowitz. The developer has not decided yet whether he will appeal the judge's ruling. □

CITY WATCH

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

City Watch Issues DayPlanner

Tuesday, March 23**City Council (10a)**

*Possible Rec & Parks/DWP
properties for community gardens*

Wednesday, March 24**Public Works (9a)**

*Increase in fines for illegally
posted commercial signs*

Transportation (2p)

*DOT report on policy on violations
in areas where posted signs are
faded, obscured or missing*

(Visit the City website

www.lacity.org

*for meeting room numbers
and complete agendas)*

Saturday, March 27**Citywide Alliance Forum
(9:30a)**

*Guests: Sheriff Lee Baca;
Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa
LACC Faculty Lounge*

Saturday, May 22**Congress of
Neighborhoods
(8:30a)**

LA Convention Center

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We Get Letters ...

Elections Not Well Planned

Check the Daily Breeze ... on the Neighborhood Council system and concerns on elections issues (*See City Watch, March 8, "The Days of Whine and Roses"*.) Both Janice Hahn and I have our views shared in this editorial.

Daily Breeze editorial (3/7/04) reads, in part: "Jerry Gaines, a San Pedro resident who served on the city's appointed Charter Reform Commission, said one of the problems that occurred in Westchester/Playa del Rey was that the election was not well planned. One of the keys is to have well-thought-out bylaws and long-term planning for elections.

The neighborhood council in Wilmington sets aside a set number of council seats for residents and a set number for business interests to ensure balance. The Westchester council might consider that alternative, as well as more definitive rules on election oversight.

Neither (Janice) Hahn or Gaines favors putting the neighborhood councils into a top-down, rigid bureaucracy. Their purpose is to advise elected leaders on development and policy and thereby to counter the influence of lobbyists. The trick is to give each council the freedom to chart its own path and a structure that can be embraced by all stakeholders."

-Jerry Gaines

Former Appointed Charter Reform Commissioner

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South L.A. Potential Sponsors:

(*See City Watch, March 8, "Welcome to McPolitics at LA's Drive-thru City Hall"*)

*KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) *El Pollo Loco, *-Kragen, *Auto Zone, *Toyota, *Multi-million dollar Faith based Organizations, i.e., *Crenshaw Christian Center, *West Angeles Cogic, and *Baptist Alliance. *Shameful to say, the *Alcoholic Beverage Industry. A concern that walks away with millions, probably billions, after adding fuel to the misery of poor people. South Los Angeles is over - concentrated with Alcoholic Beverage Sale Outlets (Liquor Stores) and they are not going anywhere. At least there could be some monetary reward to the neighborhoods they destroy. * Superior Super Market (s), (rumored to earn a whopping \$700,000 to \$1,000,000 per day at one store). *Ralphs Markets, *McDonalds, *Pizza Hut and *L.A. Times, *Arco, *Mettler Industrial Complex. List might also include some athletes, i.e., Magic Johnson, Lakers, Kings, Clippers, etc.

There are roughly 16 neighborhood councils in South Los Angeles, it might be interesting to come together to discuss this idea and see what the reaction would be. Clearly, it is an excellent idea, one that would signal that NC's are ready to take part in helping a city government

Continued Next Column

Citywide Alliance

NC Deals with Departments, ½ Cent Tax on March Docket

LA Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa and LA Sheriff Lee Baca will headline the Citywide Alliance program for this Saturday, March 27. Villaraigosa is a member of the Education and Neighborhoods Committee and Baca will make his case for his ½ Cent Public Safety Sales Tax.

The Forum's breakout sessions will deal with the working agreement between the Department of Public Works and four Valley NC's and the Letter of Intent signed on March 20, between NC's and the Department of Water and Power. Both are precedent setting and are certain to likely the way Neighborhood Councils and City Departments do business. (*See stories on Page 1.*)

Also scheduled, Assistant City Clerk, Frank Martinez, who will provide a progress report on the Election Procedures Working Group. ☐

Continued from previous column

in crisis, but, more importantly, showcases an idea that could provide local companies and organizations opportunity to weigh in at a time when neighborhood councils are young, but plays a significant and historical role involving our city fiducially. Most likely, many listed here do not have a clue that they are Stakeholders in the neighborhoods where they do business. This could also be an educational piece for them too. Perhaps some NC's wouldn't feel as threatened when neighborhood business stakeholders, residing outside of the neighborhood, take part in the election process, per City Charter mandate, if they knew these stakeholders were also contributing sponsors. This is a good idea that might be worth NC's taking look into the probabilities. Might be that each NC could seek out one sponsor in the beginning and later invite others to join. I can foresee potential and fun doing this, and maybe, create some important relationships from it all.

Always Abounding With Hope

Elizabeth

Empowerment Congress Southeast Area NDC

...

(*Letters may be edited for brevity and/or clarity.*)

City Watch welcomes your comments.

Forward to: Editor at sirken323@aol.com

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

Conversation: BONC's Ron Stone (Part 2)
**On Grievances, Decertification,
 the Valley Glen Decision & More**

*(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 Two** of that conversation.)*

CW: Commissioner, you have estimated that for every one Neighborhood Council with problems there are ten times that many that are performing successfully. You mentioned that Neighborhood Councils with problems get more media space than the successful councils. What can BONC do to help change that?

President Stone: One of the things that we want to do to change that a little bit is to invite Councils to come to Commission meetings and tell us their success stories. Talk to us a little more. Get the word out there.

CW: You have suggested that successful Neighborhood Councils can help the less successful. How?

President Stone: Twice a year we see it happen at the Congress of Neighborhoods. There's something about getting all of the Councils together. They are all different. Their boards are different. Their bylaws are different. Their communities are different. But when they come together it makes a larger fabric and there's a lot of information sharing. Also, I think the Board might be able to learn from successful Councils about how they worked their way through some sticky issues ... stakeholder grievances for example ... and make that information available to help others with similar problems.

CW: Speaking of grievances, how do you see the Blue Ribbon Panel, chaired by you and Rabbi Freehling helping?

President Stone: The Rabbi has a great deal of experience dealing with grievances and parties that don't get along with one another. I bring with me the experience from the Board. We're still in the process of framing the panel and its membership, but I'm very excited about the possibilities.

CW: Give us some perspective. Out of the 81 certified councils, how many have actually come to the BONC with what could be defined as a grievance?

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www.lacityneighborhoods.com

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President Stone: I don't know the number but it's small. It's a small portion of the 81. That's not to say that the system can't be tweaked some. Even the successful councils can encounter some issues, like office space rental or conduction elections. Anyway, I don't know everyone but I know it's a small minority that having the problems that are most public or that we hear about.

CW: Let's talk about the Boards decisions on the Valley Glen election and the rehabilitation of Van Nuys. You allowed them to move forward. Why didn't you say to them, you've had enough time, we're going to let someone else have a go at it?

President Stone: On Van Nuys first. What was presented to us was a status report so we didn't have the ability to say, "throw out the whole thing." But I will tell you that if not everyone who appeared on the Van Nuys matter, most of them expressed hope and a desire to make this work. So, I think we owe it to them to try to figure out a way to help them do that. Clearly, stakeholders are not being served by a dysfunctional council but I believe there's a willingness to move forward.

On Valley Glen, that was also before us as a status report. I can't speak for the whole Board, but my feeling was that what we needed to do was not delay their elections any more. The City Attorney said their procedures were O.K. and I felt the best thing for them was to move forward.

CW: Do you think there should be a limit on how long a certified council has to hold its first election?

President Stone: Speaking for myself, I'm concerned when there's a council that's been certified for several months, going on years, without an election. There can be a variety of reasons for that. I think the department needs to explore what's going on and how they can help. If the problem continues, I think the Board needs to look at it too. We have asked department staff to report back to the Board on the status of those councils that haven't gone forward. During that report the Commission can ask questions and have the Neighborhood Council to come in and explain. There could be valid reasons, but I think we need to do everything possible to help them move forward.

Continued on Page 7. See "Ron Stone"

Opposition-Continued from Page 1

The Daily News reported Sunday, that Councilman Tony Cardenas believes the DWP failed to make its case for the 18% increase and could support 11% over one year to "keep the utility solvent." The paper also claimed that Councilman Greig Smith opposes the rate increase and wants an outside audit whenever the water company asks for an increase.

The DWP proposal could get to the City Council as early as Friday. Certainly by the end of next week. According to Gerald Gewe, DWP CEO, the proposal cannot be amended by the City Council, but can be sent back to the DWP Board for modification.

Letter of Intent Signed

In the meantime, and perhaps of even more importance, Neighborhood Council representatives and DWP signed a Letter of Intent on Saturday agreeing to meet within 30 days to craft a plan that would include NC's in future DWP planning and policy-making. The document will be patterned after the Department of Public Works/NC Memorandum of Understanding that was signed in late January and recognized before the City Council last Friday.

The LOI culminates several weeks of discussion with DWP, led by Northridge activist Jim Alger, Silver Lake NC's Co-Chair, Rusty Millar and a number of other Neighborhood Council leaders.

NC's Show Unity

A letter will go out in the next ten days, according to Millar, advising all NC boards of the project specifics and the guidelines for their participation in the development process.

Neighborhood Councils have demonstrated "an unprecedented show of unity throughout the city," Alger says. "The DWP agreement could take City and NC cooperation to the next level."

The Neighborhood Councils have raised the voice they believe the Charter promised them. Now, what remains, is to see if anyone is listening. ■



Budgetto-Continued from Page 2

The nearly forgotten Task Force report seems like a good starting point for the Broad Committee. Many of the issues raised are still as relevant today as in 1988. At that time, newly hired General Manager Al Nodal, took on the job of developing a comprehensive arts plan, which involved community arts organizations, professional artists and the major arts institutions. This plan looked at every planning district in the city and mapped local arts institutions, nonprofit organizations, performance spaces and spaces of historical significance.

Support for Arts Crumbling

Seventeen years later, the City's support for the arts is crumbling. Under the weight of its fiscal problem, the arts are viewed as non-essential. Rough economic times and political leadership in the past failed to see that creativity is our most valuable raw material.

The arts are for everyone. Let's hope that our civic leadership steps forward and fulfills the promise of its 1988 predecessor. ■

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We've
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CITY WATCH

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

Perspectives-Continued from Page 1

The fact that complaints about the electronic voting process followed in the wake of the March 2 election, that their own City Council couldn't muster a quorum in December or that the in-fighting and political maneuvering is over the edge, every 10 years, when the City redesigns its districts, somehow escaped the Charter visionaries. Of course, as DONE's Greg Nelson says, how much progress NC's are making depends on whose expectations that progress is being measured against.

It also occurs to us, that if the Education and Neighborhoods Committee is going to invest so much time in listening to the whiners and the disenchanted, they would do well to invite some of the many functioning and successful Neighborhood Councils to stop by and report on how they have quietly gone about tending to NC business and serving their stakeholders. Their empowerment stories would build confidence and ease the pain of these elevated, and perhaps less than realistic, expectations.

Precedent-Setting Stuff

How timely then, that the DPW and DWP agreements should surface now. Or, that 30-plus Neighborhood Councils coalesced this weekend, on the water rate hike issue, and set out to make their voices heard in City Council offices and in the Council Chamber. This is precedent-setting stuff. And, it does, in fact, change the way the City does business.

On Friday, the City Council recognized the work of USC's Dr. Terry Cooper, representatives from the four participating NC's and the Department of Public Works. Together they crafted a "partnership" agreement that will likely become a template for Neighborhood Councils and city departments for years to come. Among the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding: 1) Appointed NC representatives will work directly with DPW; 2) DPW will develop an education program for NC's, including the development and financing of projects; 3) Stakeholder participation in programs and their delivery will be ensured; and, 4) these NC participants will provide "input into the programs and delivery of services to the NC's stakeholders, both prior to, during and subsequent to" their formulation. Heady stuff for an infant NC system whose "vital signs" are being questioned by "policy makers".

How the Project Happened

The idea for the partnership was Dr. Cooper's, but Paul Waters (Studio City NC) fashioned the project, steered it through the amazingly fast 90-day negotiating process and crafted the Memorandum of Understanding. Mid Town's Diann Corral also played a key role.

The four councils in the agreement (Studio City, Greater Toluca Lake, Mid Town North Hollywood and Valley Village) were the result of geographic proximity and a history of sharing and cooperation. The idea is that as this program takes form other councils will be brought into the process until all LA neighborhoods are represented.

DWP/NC's Sign Letter of Intent

The significance of the DPW/NC agreement was underscored on Saturday, when the Department of Water and Power and Neighborhood Council representatives signed a Letter of Intent to begin work in 30 days on a similar document. This pact would include a larger number of Neighborhood Councils and would, of course, be adapted to Water Department services. The concept would be the same.

Board of Neighborhood Commissioners President, Ron Stone, told City Watch that for every one complaining or troubled NC, there are ten that are keeping the Charter's promise and satisfying their stakeholders. So, it would appear,

Quotables

"The trick is to give each council the freedom to chart its own path and a structure that can be embraced by all stakeholders."

-Daily Breeze Editorial
(Page 3)

"I'm concerned when there's a council that's been certified for several months, going on years, without an election."

-Ron Stone
BONC President

Cont. from previous column measuring the progress of the Neighborhood Council system isn't just about different expectations. It's also about perception. And, as long as folks keep looking through the small end of the funnel, their vision will be skewed and their conclusions out of sync with reality. Hopefully, the DPW and DWP agreements will not only change the way the City and Neighborhood Councils do business but will change the perception of how the NC system is doing. ■

Continued Next Column

Ron Stone-Continued from Page 4

CW: Will the BONC ever start a review process, say every two years, to measure how councils are doing or how they are living up to their certification promises, with the thought of decertifying failing councils?

President Stone: I don't have the Plan with me, but I believe there are a couple of different assessments involved. There's an assessment of the entire Council system which, I think, is five years from the adoption of the plan. That could certainly be one, but that's an eternity from now. Neighborhood Councils have to do self-assessments every two years. That's something that our Board will definitely take a look at. Back to your original question about the State of the System, I think these evaluations will be an important tool in evaluating the state of the system.

CW: What are the councils doing that you find particularly gratifying. Where you say, "Wow, that's exactly the way I envisioned it?"

President Stone: Well, a lot of the "wow", "gee whiz" things are the little things. Every time I look at a City Council agenda and see a Community Impact Statement. That means that a Neighborhood Council has been notified ... probably through the Early Notification System ... and has weighed in. That makes me smile. It let's me know that one of the most important goals of the system, getting information out to councils, is working. But then, I don't see that often enough, so my smile disappears and I want to see more.

When I see Neighborhood Councils involved in large macro city issues like the budget, like the issues before them when they come to City Council. I think that's extremely impressive.

CW: Looking back over your time with the Board, what would you have done differently?

President Stone: Now that we have seen some of the problems that have come up in elections and how grievances are dealt with, we want to make sure that Neighborhood Council bylaws are as thoroughly reviewed as possible.

CW: Should there be election and grievance guidelines or there be mandatory rules?

President Stone: My feeling is that we shouldn't have a one-size-fits-all. We should encourage creativity. I'm on record, for example, as someone who supports the town hall concept, which is different.

CW: One subject that, over these formative months, has gotten its share of discussion is the definition of stakeholders. Where do you come down?

Continued next column

CITY WATCH Publishing Dates

April 5, 2004

April 19, 2004

May 3, 2004

May 17, 2004

Continued from previous column

President Stone: I think that for the most part it's working. Certainly defining stakeholders as only residents is not what the charter framers had in mind. As a matter of fact, most of the councils we've certified actually defined stakeholders more broadly than the requirement in the Ordinance and the Plan. From the evidence, there seems to be more interest in broadening the definition.

CW: Thank you Commissioner Stone. You have a tough assignment. We wish you, and the system, well.

President Stone: Thank you. ■