

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

A tip of the hat to Robert Greene for the most comprehensive piece on Los Angeles' new system of neighborhood councils [["Not in My Neighborhood Council,"](#) August 25–September 2]. It would have been easy to highlight only the goofy experiences of the neighborhood councils, and thereby present readers with a distorted view; however, I will probably have to create an urban-myths list for those who believe that if it's in print, it is indeed fact. The readers of this story will be happy to know that not one neighborhood council has ever spent money on a limousine.

L.A. Weekly is lucky to have Robert Greene. He deserves a raise, or at least a better office.

—Greg Nelson
General Manager,
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
Los Angeles

I am surprised and disappointed by Robert Greene's article "Not in My Neighborhood Council." It seems as if Mr. Greene began with a thesis he wanted to support and no amount of factual information to the contrary could sway his perspective. Certainly, the pull quote by me does not accurately reflect the tone or substance of our conversation. Throughout the discussion, I expressed that, although there have been some minor administrative hurdles, the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council is building a system that is inclusive and accessible, and functions with surprising ease. This remains true.

Similarly, it is false that the SLNC's position paper on inclusionary zoning supports development of affordable housing "elsewhere." On the contrary, the paper clearly delineates zones suitable for further development right in the heart of Silver Lake.

Finally, it strikes me as perhaps half a decade too soon to call the N.C. system "broken." Most councils are scarcely a year old — two at the most. Buildings can't have structural integrity until construction is complete, and as of now this edifice is scarcely more than a mass of steel girders. To declare it doomed is premature and cynical.

—Jason Lyon
Co-Chair, Governing Board,
Silver Lake Neighborhood Council
Silver Lake

As one of the founding members of the Neighborhood Councils Movement back in 1992, I had a ringside seat as the pressure mounted and culminated in the charter-reform victory. Ironically, one of the arguments set forth in favor of advisory, rather than decision-making, councils was that we would not have to drown in the red tape required for decision-making bodies in California; however, that same bureaucracy provides potential relief from another hazard Greene so accurately identifies — the tendency of

entrenched neighborhood power brokers to hijack the democratic process to extend their lifetime stranglehold on community-leadership status.

Case in point: My own West L.A. Neighborhood Council is currently going through its first election for its board of directors (BOD). As in most BODs, West L.A. designated a portion of the seats for residents, businesses, churches and schools, with a few at-large seats open to everyone, giving every stakeholder a choice of seats for which to run. But a few “community leaders” decided they shouldn’t have to make their choice *before* the election — they would simply run for as many seats as they wanted to, see how well they did and then take the seat wherever they got the most votes.

Needless to say, neighbors who have worked long and hard to set up an open and fair election aren’t taking this lying down. Suddenly, another sleepy little exercise in civic-mindedness has become a lot more interesting as people begin taking sides.

—Jon Shaughnessy
Founding Member,
Neighborhood Councils Movement
West Los Angeles