

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

August 31, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 16

CITY WATCH

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CITY WATCH is published to promote grassroots civic engagement through information and ideas.

CITY WATCH is published electronically on Tuesday of every other week. Share it with your Neighborhood Council and other activists.

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Inclusionary Zoning Watch

NC Support for Inclusionary Zoning Bill Appears to be in Short Supply

By David Lowell

Neighborhood Council support for the Reyes-Garcetti Inclusionary Zoning ordinance appears to be hard to come by. At least in its present incarnation. Of the 26 councils reporting in, 11 have formed a position and six more have adgendized the issue. The remainder are still trying to get their collective heads around a complex and contentious discussion.

All 11 of the Councils that have reached a position are opposing the ordinance in its present form. "We do have concerns about implementing an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance based on the City's IZ Matrix and therefore oppose the ordinance as currently proposed," says Glassell Park. "The one-size-fits-all approach of the current proposed ordinance does not take into account the unique planning and land use needs of specific communities." That's from Silver Lake.

Aside from agreeing that the bill should not go forward in its present form, Neighborhood Councils offer up a variety of advice as different as the Councils are different. Loss of parking, the overriding of Specific Plans and Community Design Overlays are among their concerns.

Continued on Page 4. See "Zoning Support Slipping"

Perspectives

Does BONC Have the Teeth to Take a Bite out of Failing & Dysfunctional NC's

By Ken Draper

It's time for leadership to step forward and do something meaningful about failing and dysfunctional Neighborhood Councils. And, it must happen now before their performance, or lack thereof, sours the citywide system and begins to infect the good work of so many other councils.

Consider this partial list. Neighborhood Councils, two years deep into certification, incapable of, or unwilling to, hold their first elections. Neighborhood Councils so divided they are incapable of holding a board meeting for lack of a quorum. Neighborhood Councils holding elections in defiance of and without the approval of DONE and without third-party oversight. Neighborhood Councils knowingly violating the Brown Act. There are more than a dozen councils, and growing, in election trouble, or just plain in trouble. And, no one appears willing or capable of doing anything about it.

The problem of dysfunctional and scofflaw councils is reaching critical mass. It's spilling out into the media and seeping into inter-council communications and has begun to affect the optimistic and hopeful perception that

Continued on Page 5. See "Perspectives"

NC's to Participate in DWP Budget Process Page 4

Guest Commentary**LA's Disappointing School Test Scores:
Who in the World Should We Blame?**

By Drew Furedi

When state test results were released recently, showing that reading and math scores for elementary school students dipped slightly, local media and others rushed to try to pin the blame. That reaction revealed a sad fact about the way we view and discuss public education: everyone is an expert and everyone else is to blame for the system's flaws.

So, who is to blame? Let's take a look at the usual suspects: teachers, parents, the system and too few dollars.

As a former teacher, I would argue that while teachers cannot take all the blame, they must be willing to accept their roles and the responsibility that comes with them. It is a cop-out to blame parents, just as it is wrong to judge them completely faultless. Lashing out at "the system" or bashing the bureaucracy is a tried and true tactic for scores of union-backed politicians, but one that does not advance the debate.

Finally, even with the nearly \$10-billion in cuts over the past several years, one would have to be dreaming to think that sufficient funding alone would fix education's ills although there is little doubt that lack of money is a serious contributor.

Continued on Page 6. See "Test Scores"

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Guest Commentary**Proposed Security Consolidation Means
Service & Safety Loss in LA Parks**

By Kristin Sabo

Questionable planning and a frenzied timeline for a proposed consolidation of all non-LAPD Security Officers by January 2005 could mean a loss of public safety and services for Los Angeles park patrons.

Intended to cut costs and streamline the bureaucracy, during a time of financial difficulty for the City, three City Council members proposed a consolidation of all Los Angeles non-LAPD law enforcement personnel in early 2004. Since the Mayor's endorsement in March, the City has been quietly slamming this poorly researched proposal through the system.

Consolidation Proposal

According to the City's April 4 feasibility study, there are 280.5 full-time budgeted non-LAPD security positions within seven agencies, General Services, Recreation and Parks, Library, Convention Center, Zoo, El Pueblo and CRA.

The annual cost for these positions is approximately \$18.5 million with another \$4 million tied up in contracting other part-time security staff.

In the proposed consolidation, the Department of General Services would become the blanket agency for all non-LAPD security officers, absorbing the Library, Zoo, El Pueblo and Park Rangers, who have peace officer status. The theory is that by pooling these officers, costs will be reduced while providing a faster, more efficient, response to citywide incidents.

Continued on Page 7. See "Park Security"

**MemoMemoMemo
CITY WATCH**

August 31, 2004

City Watch Subscribers.

The City Council, and most of its committees, have been in recess for a healthy chunk (3 ½ weeks) of this summer.

City Watch has used this break to relax our distribution deadlines, grow the staff, grow our communications resources and prepare for a busy fall ... which includes celebrating the first anniversary of the New City Watch.

It has been a year now since Mark Siegel and I dusted off and resuscitated City Watch, a popular publication that Mark founded more than five years ago.

Join us for the September issues. We'll take a look back at the early issues and a look ahead at the futures of Neighborhood Councils, Los Angeles and, of course, City Watch. Among our City Watch plans: A Mayoral Debate for Neighborhood Councils.

The September issues of City Watch will be published on the 14th and the 28th.

**Ken Draper, Editor
City Watch**

Tracking the Issues (I-Trac)

Decision on Solar Delayed

Residents & Contractors Play a Role

DWP's solar energy rebate program was put on hold yet again in mid-August when Board President, Dominick Rubalcava realized he would have trouble getting the three votes he needed for approval. (See "Solar Incentive" story-City Watch August 10 issue.)

Homeowners and contractors called the new program biased, claiming that 50% of the DWP revenue comes from residential customers but only 20% of the rebate monies have been set aside for residential rebates. The LA Times quoted California Solar Engineering President, Peter Parish, as saying that the funding formula represented a "grossly inequitable allocation."

Rubalcava claimed that the reason for big projects getting 50% of the rebate funds was because they were more effective at raising the public's awareness. He agreed to have the DWP staff work on a compromise.

The Solar Power Incentive matter is scheduled to come before the Commission again on Tuesday (9/11/04). It is expected that, as part of the compromise, the residential share will be raised to 30%. ■

Newsrack Bill Coming to a Head

Uniform Color Issue is Main Sticking Point

Long in the works, the City's proposed new Newsrack Ordinance is headed back to Council one more time. Although there may be a few other minor differences, the issue of most concern to the CLEAN Coalition, supported by a number of Neighborhood Councils, is uniform color.

In addition to limiting the number of newsracks to 16 for every 200 feet, the ordinance requires that they all be the same color green. CLEAN worries that under pressure from the publishers, some council members could break ranks on the color issue. At least three council members, Parks, Zine and Villaraigosa, have begun making a case against uniform color ... Parks says it's not an issue in his district, Zine thinks it might appear to be anti-business and Villaraigosa thinks "some additional compromises may be necessary."

The ordinance is due back in Council in late September or early October and a showdown appears certain. It's a basic and critical element and neither side seems willing to back off. Villaraigosa's thoughts about "additional compromises" may be wishful thinking. ■

NC's to Get Place on City Agendas

At the urging of City Councilman Tom LaBonge, the City Council approved a motion instructing the City Clerk to begin listing NC certification numbers on Council Referral reports the agendas of all official City meetings.

Continued next column

Issues Watch

(Citywide Top Ten)

1. Inclusionary Zoning
2. ½ Cent Public Safety Sales Tax
3. LAX Expansion
4. Transparent DWP Funds Transfer
5. Big Box Retail Superstores
6. Pay for Play Ethics Issue
7. Business Tax Reform
8. 2005-2006 City Budget
9. Solar Power Rebate Program
10. 20% Renewable Energy

Continued from previous column

The NC id numbers will be noted next to Referral and Agenda items that affect their areas, just as City Council districts are listed now.

The same motion also asks the Information and Technology Agency and DONE to create NC web pages for the My Neighborhood section of the City's website. ■

NC's Want DWP's 11% Delayed

West Hills Latest NC to Join Growing List

The West Hills Neighborhood Council joined the growing list of Neighborhood Councils in support of the Villaraigosa-Weiss motion, calling for suspension of the 11% DWP rate increase enacted earlier this year.

Since the rate hike was approved, the DWP has come under fire by the City Controller for alleged mismanagement. Adding fuel to the fire, next Tuesday the DWP Commission plans to approve a 5% wage increase for DWP professional and administrative employees.

In the meantime, Villaraigosa's motion to suspend the rate action has not been acted on by the City Council, prompting several already suspicious Neighborhood Councils to begin questioning the reasoning behind the motion in the first place.

"It has become increasingly clear that this rate action was not needed," says Jim Alger, spearhead of the opposition to the original 18% increase, "this issue doesn't need to be politicized by ambitious council members. If their intentions were truly in the interest of the ratepayers, the City Council would stop dragging their feet and pass the suspension motion forthwith." ■

Agreement Would Set a Precedent**Progress Reported on Pact
between DWP and Councils**

By Ken Draper

With the collaboration still in the early stages, the Department of Water and Power has agreed to include Neighborhood Councils in the DWP budget process. They will also provide regional Liaison's to help maintain communication lines and short-cut response times to NC needs and requests.

Neighborhood Council representatives and DWP management are in the second month of their effort to forge a Partnership Agreement dealing with notification, education, policy planning and delivery of services. Should their collaboration effort succeed, it would be the first time a major City agency has reached an agreement with Neighborhood Councils citywide. The Department of Public Works signed a Memorandum of Understanding with four Valley NC's earlier this year.

Reason for Partnership

The purpose of the Partnership of Inclusion, between NC's and the DWP, is to put process and systems in place that enable the DWP to fulfill the Charter requirements for notification, sufficient time for NC's to be able to provide input before a vote is taken, and the monitoring of the delivery of city services.

Over half of the Neighborhood Councils with elected Boards have committed to the Partnership project. Of the participating Councils, 28 have sent official representatives to the negotiating table. DWP Chief Executive Officer, Jerry Gewe, leads the Water and Power delegation. The negotiations are being facilitated by Board of Neighborhood Commissioner's Pat Herrera Duran.

All Councils Benefit

As it now stands, if the effort succeeds, all Councils will benefit from the early notification, liaison and other conditions that result. However, only participating NC's will be asked to sign off on the agreement.

Some of the more complex parts of the pact still lay ahead, however, participants are hoping to have their work completed by year's end. ■

CITY WATCH**Future Assignments**

- **Big Box Retail: More jobs & low prices, so what's not to like?**
- **Inside the Affordable Housing Puzzle: A former Commissioner speaks up.**
 - **Alternatives to Urban Landfills.**
- **Filming in LA: Extortion Secret Exposed.**
- **Diary of a Project Coordinator: There is another side.**

Issues Watch*(NC Top Ten)*

1. NC Election Procedures
2. NC Funding Delays
3. Brown Act Modification
4. Sanctions for Failing/Dysfunctional NC's
5. NC/DWP Partnership Negotiations
6. Citywide NC Outreach/Promotion
7. NC Congress of Issues
8. Decision-Making Powers
(Public Works/Land Use/Budget)
9. NC Appointments to Commissions
10. Cable TV Access
- 11.

Zoning Support Slipping-Cont from Pg 1

The Central City Association has come up with an alternative plan ("Housing for All: Fair Share Program") that appears to have legs. It answers some of the concerns expressed by NC's and others. A number of City Council members are preparing to offer their own plans or amendments for Inclusionary Zoning. Perry, Parks, Weiss and Smith are among those who oppose the Reyes-Garcetti motion, or have ideas of their own.

With the Neighborhood Councils asserting their opposition and a fair number of the City Council itself looking in other directions, it would appear that the Reyes-Garcetti version is heading into deep water as it approaches Council consideration in late September or October. ■

**Upcoming
Neighborhood Cafe****Programs**

--Graffiti Prevention --
Sept 6 (10a & 7:30p)

--Neighborhood Improvement Projects--
Sept 13 (10a & 7:30p)

--Spring/Main Street Revitalization--
Sept 20 (10a & 7:30p)

All on Channel 35

Perspectives- Continued from Page 1

accompanied the birth of LA's Councils. It is souring the morale of the NC troops and threatening the faith and confidence that has carried Neighborhood Councils through these bumpy embryonic years. That's why this is no longer a private issue for a few discordant neighborhoods. It's a citywide issue and it will soon begin to affect hard working and functioning councils that are tending to business and serving their stakeholders, who, after all, are the real victims here. And, no one seems able, or willing, to step forward to apply a tourniquet before the trickle turns to full fledged bloodletting.

Whose Job Is It?

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment says it is hard put to act without a stakeholder complaint to act on. The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners says that all they can do is approve bylaws, certify and decertify. And, the philosophy to date has been: better to have a dysfunctional Council for a neighborhood than no council at all. Thus, the BONC has not been inclined to pull the plug on a certified council, even one that breaks the rules or refuses to hold an election.

Some of the reasons for that thinking: we have exalted, over the past two years, over the 81 certifications, no one wants to see the trend reverse itself. Also, what does a de-certification say about the folks who recommended and approved the certification? There have been some, insiders say, who never want this Board to have too much power, or for that matter, Councils to become so effective that they upset the political power centers.

BONC Should Step Forward

But there are those, who believe as I do, that the folks who should be stepping up to the leadership plate is the BONC. There also those who believe that if the Board were willing to assume it, they have a lot more authority than claimed. The Ordinance (#172728) that created the Department describes the Powers and Duties of the Board thusly, "...setting and overseeing policy, approving contracts and leases and promulgating rules and regulations." It doesn't seem like it would take a whole lot of creative interpretation here to see the Commissioners "setting a policy" that limits the number of months a Council can ignore, or fail, their obligation to serve the stakeholders before they unleash one of their other powers: de-certification.

Perhaps, they could use their policy-setting powers to create various levels of sanctions, so that one penalty doesn't have to fit all sins.

NC's Considering Action

The problem with impotent, dysfunctional and rebel councils has reached the level of seriousness where Neighborhood Councils themselves have begun discussing what action they will take to prevent these groups from doing irreparable damage to the system as a whole, and in turn, to their councils.

If the solutions to the failed and failing councils are uncertain, one thing does seem abundantly clear: The time, and opportunity, is now for the BONC to step forward and provide some policy, some inspiration and some leadership. Neighborhood Councils need a program for citywide image building. And, they need to have this dysfunction tumor excised before it does irreversible damage to the great grassroots experiment in neighborhood democracy. ■

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Test Scores-Continues from Page 2

Ultimately, the group that will be held most accountable is the students. In California, we've demonstrated a knack for allowing our state leaders to cut funding for education, and in the same breath, approving massive bond measures that will come due when today's students become adults.

Despite the fact that the test scores show modest gains in some middle schools, the majority of middle and high school students (at an even greater rate than the elementary school students) are being failed by the system.

What Are You Going to Do?

At the end of the day, the main question we should be asking, and answering, about test scores and the state of public education is, "What am I going to do about it?"

High on the list of answers to that question: Stop blaming everyone and everything else and assume some personal responsibility. Get involved.

At the very least, you can apply pressure to political and education leaders, hold them accountable and ask the tough questions. Don't accept at face value that education and kids are priority one. What how the proof. Push them to walk the walk.

Demand to Know

Get involved with a school near you. Demand to know what the school down the street or the school system are doing to improve test scores. We all have a stake in this, whether or not you have children and whether or not your child attends public school.

Volunteer at a neighborhood school. Help to locate resources for effective programs – needed to make up for lost funding. Press local media to also report on positive solutions to education issues.

It's not a difficult concept. If you don't like what you see, be a part of the solution. ■

(Drew Furedi has been a teacher and is currently a nonprofit education consultant. Furedi has been involved with education for 12 years. He lives in Los Angeles.)

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Reminder

**The City Council will remain in recess
until after Labor Day.**



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Park Security-Continued from Page 2

At first reading, the feasibility study's major conclusions appear to support going forward with proposal. According to the document, consolidation of these groups would yield an annual cost savings of between \$300,000 and \$900,000 (1.6% to 5%) and a net reduction of 17.5 positions city-wide.

Fundamental to these findings, the study assumes a basic similarity in the structure and function within each individual agency's security division. Unfortunately, that assumption fails in at least one case: the Park Rangers. In fact, the feasibility study itself acknowledges these notable differences. A full section is dedicated solely to the Rangers' differing organization and job duties, while suggesting methods to successfully integrate them. The problem is, not having the Rangers in the plan minimizes the savings and service benefits and reduces the value of the consolidation effort.

Potential Problems

Unfortunately for LA park patrons, there are a number of potential problems with including the Park Rangers in the consolidation:

1. City-wide, there may be an increase in response, but the park going-public stands to lose public safety service.
2. Park Rangers who are peace officers become general services peace officers if they go through the training. They are no longer Park Rangers. Those who choose to remain with Recreation and Parks and to not go through the training are stripped of their peace officer duties. Thus, the unique expertise required to serve and protect in our parks is lost.

3. The Rangers, who are firefighters and become General Service's officers, will be lost. At least, for the next two or three years, the time it would take for General Services officers to complete firefighter training.

#4. There are many major issues, in this consolidation, with respect to the Senior Rangers and the service they currently provide.

Users Be Aware

The millions of LA park users need to be aware, the City is moving quickly on this proposal, with the finalization of consolidation planned for early January 2005.

The Recreation & Parks Commissioners had intended to delete 46 Park Ranger positions from their budget at their August 19th meeting. A number of concerned citizens and neighborhood council representatives both wrote to and spoke at that meeting. As a result, the Board along with RAP General Manager agreed to create a task force to solicit public input and study the proposal more closely. However, no task force has been announced and a look at the September 15 agenda for the Recreation and Parks Commission would indicate that their plan is to attempt to move the consolidation proposal forward.

Neighborhood Councils that care about the City's parks should make plans accordingly.

Important meetings: 1. Recreation & Parks Commission (Special)-September 1 (9:30am) 2. Recreation & Parks Commission-September 15 (9:30am)

Agendas and locations at: www.lacity.org

(Kristin Sabo is a community activist and a member of the Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council. She is also a volunteer at Amir's Garden. She can be reached at: admin@wildwildwest.org.) ■

