

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

August 10, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 15

CITY WATCH

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

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CITY WATCH EXCLUSIVE

Iraqis "Invade" US

Delegation Visits LA to Study Grass Roots Democracy and Neighborhood Councils

By Ken Draper

An Iraqi delegation, including three Mayors and one Deputy Governor stopped by Los Angeles this week in search of insight on the democratic process, in particular, Neighborhood Councils. The meeting provided some surprises and what could safely be described as a mutual education.

The LA visit was part of a US tour, sponsored by the State Department. The stop at City Hall included a session with Mayor James Hahn, DONE General Manager Greg Nelson and representatives from two NC's, CORO and LA's Human Relations Commission, headed by Rabbi Allen Freehling.

Among the meeting's surprises: Iraq already has Neighborhood Councils, 86 in Greater Baghdad alone. As one visitor noted, "That's more than you have," meaning Los Angeles.

Considering the daily headlines out of Iraq, the gathering had a surreal quality to it: Iraqi community leaders, having left the bombings and insurgency behind to work their way through the United States in search of keys to building municipal democratic government, hoping that the result might help one day relieve the tensions they will return to. Phrases like "after the fall of Baghdad", "the Coalition Authorities" and "during the occupancy" were, for them, a natural part of the dialogue.

Delegates reported that Neighborhood Councils in Iraq were the result of the Coalition Authority's urging. They had provided the Iraqis, they said, with a manual ... a blueprint ... on "how to form a Neighborhood Council, how to hold elections, term limits and commitment."

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Status Report

NC Taskforce, DWP Negotiations Slow & Go

By David Lowell

The Department of Water and Power and a task force of Neighborhood Council representatives will meet again this Saturday. They're attempting to craft a precedent-setting partnership agreement that would commit them to collaboration and would systemize delivery of DWP obligations to NC's as defined in the Charter, such as realistic early notification, input on policy and monitoring the delivery of services.

According to organizer Jim Alger, 31 Neighborhood Councils have sent letters confirming their participation in the project. Twenty two Councils have representatives serving on the negotiating Taskforce. CEO Gerald Gewe heads the DWP contingent and Pat Herrera Duran from the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners is facilitating the effort.

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Cityscape**Build a Park, Save the City**

By Jim McQuiston

(Mention infrastructure and most people think: sewers, streets, bridges and water pipes. Management consultant and activist, Jim McQuiston, believes Los Angeles is ignoring an equally important infrastructure: social. Quality of life, he contends, cannot be measured by adequate sewage disposal and well maintained streets alone. This is his report, edited for space and clarity by City Watch.)

Los Angeles needs a workable and productive *social infrastructure* and it needs it now. Large parts of the City have substandard parks, schools, and housing. The present segregation built into the General Plan is neither proper nor excusable.

Transiency = Neglect

Infrastructure-deficient areas require extra city services. They disappoint stakeholders and promote transiency. Transient stakeholders lose their sense of community and resort to neglect and carelessness and sometimes to defiling the neighborhood.

The projected population increase means that time is of the essence, especially considering that most of that increase will come from present resident offspring, not from out of state. Many communities in Los Angeles are at present in need of job sites, play sites, school sites and trading sites, not just places to reside. These social infrastructure problems already contribute to diminishing public safety and youth that are ill prepared for college and decent jobs.

The projected population increase means that time is of the essence, especially considering that most of that increase will come from present resident offspring, not from out of state. Many communities in Los Angeles are

Continued on Page 8. See "Build a Park"

Guest Commentary**DWP Solar Incentive Program****What Happened? Will it be fixed?**

By Peter T. Parrish, Ph.D.

Given the unceasing bad news coming out of the Department of Water and Power, it is ironic that a DWP Program with such impeccable credentials and broad public benefit as the Solar Incentive Program (SIP), ceased to function in February 2003 and has yet to be resuscitated.

SIP offers cash rebates to DWP customers to offset the cost of purchasing a photovoltaic system for their home or business. Funds to run the Program are derived from a 2.85% set-aside of DWP electricity revenue ... your electricity bill. Photovoltaic (PV) systems convert sunlight into electricity without producing air or noise pollution, reduce our dependence on coal and foreign oil and last upwards of 25 years with little or no maintenance. Some credentials!

Launched in June 2000, the SIP aimed to increase visibility of solar PV technology, promote the use of renewable energy and increase the energy awareness and energy efficient practices of City residents. Because of the limited funds available, DWP also set itself the goal of *equitably distributing funding across all customer segments*.

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Quotables

**"A lot of people in Iraq
demean Neighborhood**

Councils because they are

only advisory"

- Iraqi Delegate
- On LA visit
- (See page 1)



**"Every council will
benefit from some of the
systems. This is about
representing your**

stakeholders"

-NC Representative
DWP/NC Partnership Meetings
(See page 1)



"It's not a trick. I just try

harder."

-Tom LaBonge
4th District Councilman
(See page 3)



We've Got Mail

Inclusionary Zoning: The Devil is in the Details, And the City Watch Bias

I want to comment about your July 12 CITY WATCH Special Issue. I am disappointed with its bias and slant toward support of the Inclusionary Ordinance as the right step in addressing the affordable housing crisis. Get your issue right CITY WATCH, it's not "opposition to affordable housing", the issue and the controversy is that this so called solution is too sweeping in its consequences and badly thought through. It reeks more of "social agenda" than affordable housing development, and in its totality is bad planning at its worse.

Your Special Edition is hardly an objective critique on the contents of the Ordinance. Instead, you attempt to frame the controversy: "What are NC's for", as "nimby's against" affordable housing." The issue isn't whether or not there's a need for more "affordable housing", there's always been that need. Unfortunately in today's politically correct world, today's social and economic factors, which are part of the current affordable housing crisis, are ignored in the discussion of affordable housing. Until they are discussed, faced and addressed, there will never be enough affordable housing given the swiftly changing racial, social and economic demographics of LA.

The overlooked issue in your write up is that this proposed ordinance is the devil in its details, and lack thereof. Some of the recommendations, less open space, reduced parking, more density, more development along transit corridors etc are not well thought out and the implementation details are missing. You focus on "concept" when the devil is in the details, in this case the missing details. My years of experience dealing with LA City Planning has taught me, don't leave the details to be developed out of public review by the Planning Department. This proposal would establish major land use policy without details and let the Planning Department fill in the blanks. No thanks. Let's have the "details" before the ordinance goes to council vote. The details are lacking, and why shouldn't Specific Plans be excluded from any such ordinance?

I thought that the most important mission of the NC's and those NIMBY homeowner groups is to protect and improve their neighborhoods and their quality of life. As a former home owner, former homeowner association president, someone who pushed for and helped write a Specific Plan, and now a senior dependent on "affordable housing", I understand the real concerns of the NIMBYs, and the need for affordable housing.

Continued Page 5. See "Mail"

City Watch Profile

Tom LaBonge: Living Archive

By Ken Draper

Tom LaBonge is LA's Fourth District Councilman. As politics go, most will tell you his style is old school. Know where the bodies are buried and keep the pot holes filled. He was mentored by John Ferraro. He has his supporters. He has his detractors. But one thing everyone agrees on, LaBonge has a near mystical ability to remember the names of people he comes in contact with and a seemingly endless supply of historical factoids about his beloved Los Angeles. Some significant. Some simply entertaining.

So how does he do it? What's the trick? "No trick," says LaBonge, "I came from a big family and I had wonderful parents. You just always got your name called, at least for dinner, and it was always nice to get your name called."

Nice to Have Your Name Called

The theme continues, "When you were a youth, playing football for example, it's always nice to have your name called when you made a tackle or made a play. It's just nice to recognize people. I think that's the real important thing."

More than one constituent has been surprised and flattered when their name was remembered by LaBonge. It's a handy gift for a politician. "It just makes people feel good," the Councilman tells us, "and one thing an elected official can do, is make people feel good. It's not a trick. I just try harder."

Always Fascinated

And what about the part where LaBonge has become LA's Historian-without-portfolio, providing anyone who will listen with endless snippets of LA history? Well, that started with his parents too. "I used to listen to my parents and my aunts and uncles at big family barbeques tell stories (about LA) and I would remember them. It always fascinated me."

LaBonge, who was seventh of eight brothers, also learned a lot from working with his father in the newspaper business and, from people along the way. A music historian here. A fire chief there. But most of all, he has a passion for capsulated information and a sponge-like ability to retain what he soaks up. From the date Muholland turned on the city's water faucet to the park (De Longpre) where Ricky Nelson's hit song, Travlin' Man, was written, his mental encyclopedia of LA trivia never ceases to amaze. Ask his fellow members at City Council.

Babe Ruth Slept Here

While driving by a Griffith Park golf course recently, he casually noted for the television program he was taping, "This is where the great Babe Ruth, back in the '20's, heard the news of his trade from Boston to the Yankees."

"I have a great reservoir of people," LaBonge says, "and I learn a little from all of them. And, it's good for me, it makes me stronger. I'm proud of this city and when I'm out talking to neighborhood groups it helps to have a little passion."

Maybe the most insightful thought, on the Councilman's gifts, appeared earlier in this story: "It's not a trick. I just try harder."

▀

LaBonge Seeking Relief for NC's on Public Records vs. E-adds

(A few months ago, the Mar Vista Neighborhood Council was asked to provide its e-mail list to a publisher. Mar Vista declined. The Public Records Act was then invoked and Mar Vista was reportedly advised that their e-mail list was, in fact, a public record. Mar Vista chose to destroy its e-list and, in effect, said, "We have nothing to give.")

Many, if not most, NC's have stakeholder e-lists. Many of those lists were acquired with the understanding of the provider that their e-address would be kept private. The incident with Mar Vista has put NC's in general on notice and cause a fair amount of concern.

In an attempt to get a definitive ruling from the City Attorney and perhaps some relief for Neighborhood Councils, Councilman Tom LaBonge offered up a motion on the E-list vs. Public Records issue. The text of that motion follows.)

Public Records Motion

Recent public records requests made of the Mar Vista and other neighborhood councils have highlighted concerns over the state Public Records Act and its applicability to neighborhood councils. The state's Public Records Act, California Government Code Section 62.50 and following, states that all public records have to be made available to the public, except as expressly excluded.

It is currently unclear what information neighborhood councils must release to the public, upon request, from their databases, which may or may not include home phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

Many stakeholders were unaware that their private information might be shared with the general public when they provided it. There are legitimate concerns about the potential for telemarketers and other third parties attempting to use the information for non-neighborhood council-related activities.

The City Attorney is currently drafting a report with guidelines for neighborhood councils that seek to adhere to the Public Records Act while also maintaining privacy for neighborhood council members. It is important that this matter be discussed and these concerns addressed. Neighborhood councils need to be aware of this development so that they can inform their stakeholders.

THEREFORE MOVE that the Council request the City Attorney and Department of Neighborhood Empowerment report to the Education and Neighborhoods Committee within 30 days on which records of stakeholders contacts neighborhood councils are legally required to share with members of the public if so requested. (Index #04-1255) ■

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Next Issue

August 24, 2004

Taskforce-Continued from Page 1

This is the third meeting of the group and progress might be described as slow and go. "This is complicated stuff and we're breaking new ground here," explained one of the NC representatives. "There's a lot of detail in this work and there are a lot of people working on it. That can slow things down. But we're making progress and the attitude on both sides is very positive and very cooperative. Most of the people working on this seem to understand how landmark this project can be. It will affect every council and their relationship with other city departments if we succeed."

And, what about councils that do not participate in some way in the negotiations? "Every council," he said, "will benefit from some of the systems that are likely to be put in place. Like early notification. But, they will miss out on a couple of things. First, parts of this agreement are very neighborhood-specific, and they could miss out on that. Second, if they don't participate in the creation of the agreement, they will be in no position to complain if there is something missing that they think is important to their stakeholders. This is about representing your stakeholders."

Four basic categories are highlighted in the agreement outline: 1) Early notification; 2) Education of NC's and stakeholders; 3) Input into policy making; and, 4) Monitoring the delivery of services. If the partnership agreement succeeds, it will help insure that Neighborhood Councils will be notified of things like proposed rate increases in enough time to provide input before any vote is taken, will allow NC's to provide input into budgeting and policy planning and will require the DWP to provide neighborhood-specific plans to Councils regarding maintenance, installations and service. The latter, in time for NC's to influence that planning.

At the outset, planners scheduled four meetings for creating this agreement. Most participants now agree, the process is now likely to take longer than estimated.

(If you have questions about the NC/DWP Partnership of Inclusion or how your council can participate, call: 818.368.3350.) ■

Mail-Continued from Page 2

Unfortunately this badly thought out ordinance may take way more existing affordable housing than it creates and those consequences have been ignored. Herewith are some comments I am submitting to the City Council on the ordinance after reading about the Silver Lake position in Jerry Silvers email debate column.

Ah, the NIMBYs. The Silver Lake NC position on inclusionary zoning is a gem. Support yes, but not on their narrow hillside streets, etc. It was also thoughtless of them to endorse the inclusionary ordinance "transit corridors" proposal without having bothered to get all the facts. Transit centers? Maybe, if they are identified in advance in the Ordinance, such as the largely vacant area, now being redeveloped around the NOHO Red Line Station, but not "corridors."

Three important "transit corridors" come to mind. Mine, the Chandler Blvd Orange Line Busway corridor and the Wilshire Blvd. Miracle Mile area corridor, between La Brea and the Beverly Hills city limits, and Wilshire Blvd. running along the border of the Hancock Park neighborhood.

Two of these areas are filled with low-density "affordable" rental housing 2, 4, 6, 8 unit buildings. Under the inclusionary proposals, redevelopment is encouraged. Bad idea since both corridors are already filled with seniors and other lower income people living in rent controlled housing. What a great way to kill rent controlled housing. For example, there's no provision that a like number of existing affordable housing units would be replaced when removed as a consequence of inclusionary zoning, in addition to the bonus density benefits, or that displaced affordable housing tenants get first crack at the replacement housing.

The Chandler corridor between Whitsett and the Hollywood Freeway in Valley Village, for two blocks north and south of Chandler, and for 10 blocks along the Chandler bus corridor is nearly built out with "affordable" housing development, many buildings built prior to 1979. Back in the 50s city rezoning designated this area a "transit corridor" and created this multi family zone, but with lower "R" density.

Likewise along Wilshire in the Miracle Mile area, blocks of low density affordable 1920 and 30 vintage apartment buildings, north and south of Wilshire Blvd. are prime targets for inclusionary redevelopment.

If Council member Garcetti is so anxious to fill the affordable housing gap he can start in his own district at Hollywood and Vine. Every time I get off the Red Line and walk the block to Bally's Gym I wonder why so many blocks of blighted surface parking exist in and around Hollywood Blvd. Some hi rise-parking structures will free up lots of land for affordable housing, and in the process clean up the unsightly mass of ugly surface parking lots while providing affordable housing. Let Garcetti put inclusionary zoning into practice in his district first and let's see how it works before the concept is pushed on other LA communities.

Continued next column

CITY WATCH ASSIGNMENT DESK

- **Does BONC have enough teeth to put a bite in dysfunctional & derelict NC's?**
- **Big Box Retail Superstores provide discounts and jobs: What's not to like?**
- **Mayoral Candidates: Where do they stand on Neighborhood Councils?**

Continued from previous column

It will be interesting to see how Specific Plans, like the one we have in Valley Village are protected when this mistake comes to Council for vote, especially what Tom La Bonge does to protect the Hancock Park Park Mile Specific Plan affecting that 3rd transit corridor I mentioned earlier. For example, good old John Ferraro was very protective of his Hancock district with its Park Mile Specific Plan which limits density and height along Wilshire Blvd through Hancock Park. In fact, many years ago it was reading the Park Mile Plan that got me thinking, why not something like that for Valley Village. You'll only find low rises along Wilshire in the Hancock Park area as a consequence of that Specific Plan and abusive high rise development along the rest of the Wilshire corridor, in Westwood in particular.

The fact so many neighborhoods have had to create something like 90 Specific Plans speaks volumes about community reaction to bad LA City planning. This proposed ordinance carries on the long city tradition of bad land use planning. And doesn't this scheme, in effect, amount to major upzoning, change that require public hearings, amendment of the City General Plan and Community Plans and environmental (including infrastructure) impact analysis? The impact on infrastructure is ignored that's why an environmental impact analysis is required.

I have identified two locations in Valley Village where existing sewer lines overflow routinely and empty their contents onto public streets, including one in front of a 150 unit senior housing complex. Talk about infrastructure problems, we already have them and they aren't being addressed. I am in the process of documenting this problem for further action by both Council members Weiss and Greuel.

**Tom Paterson, Chairman
Land Use and Development Committee
Valley Village Neighborhood Council**

(Some letters to City Watch are edited for brevity and/or clarity. We welcome your views. Send to: Editor at lacitywatch@aol.com.)

Iraqi Delegates-Continued from page 1

The military provided some funding, but it was quickly used up. Task forces were formed, townhalls were held and the Coalition folks provided some training. However, they noted, several of the instructions in the training weren't applicable to Iraq. Especially under today's conditions. In the early going, for example, the forming councils were bombarded by requests to get water and electricity turned on. Many came looking for employment. As a result, they said, some stakeholders went home disappointed in the NC concept. An experience many of LA's Neighborhood Councils can relate to: different levels of expectation.

Another group discovery, although it should not have come as a surprise, was the commonality of problems and challenges encountered in trying to form these mini-democracies. Whether Baghdad or LA, it seems, NC's must struggle with elections, tepid interest beyond the organizing core, outreach, funding, egos and power struggles.

Sixty Day Terms for Committee Chairs

NC's, they reported, are a part of the new Iraqi constitution. Their boards run from 20-40 members and their committees have names like Health Care. For an unexplained reason, however, the terms for committee chairs run only 60 days. (If you're unhappy with the committee's leadership, not to worry, there will be a new chair in no time.)

"I was surprised," Nelson said, "at how much we have in common, considering their problem of trying to get people interested with all of the violence going on. Imagine how difficult it must be to get people to go to a meeting and openly express themselves." Further proof that LA and Baghdad will not be confused, the delegates asked that their names not be used and refused to meet with reporters.

City Hall a Lovely Building

In an e-mail that followed the meeting, one delegate described City Hall as a "lovely building, a piece of art," and went on to say that Los Angeles was a unique place "that I will never forget." But this US tour hasn't always been thus. In Memphis, their first stop on an itinerary that includes LA, Chicago and Washington DC, the group was barred from City Hall because the Council President thought they were a "security risk."

Turns out, he was more angry than threatened because the group was scheduled to meet with a councilperson other than him.

The Memphis Mayor jumped into the breach, apologized and set up a meeting outside of City Hall. But the Memphis adventure wasn't over. On the way back to the hotel that evening, one of the women delegates and an interpreter were mugged while walking along a Memphis street. Welcome to America!

Democracy Journey Bumpy

Rabbi Freehling apologized for Memphis, in his welcome remarks, and promised a kinder and gentler journey through Los Angeles. Then the LA contingent tried to explain the why and how of LA's NC's. Nelson pointed out, poignantly, that Los Angeles' Councils came about because "the City wasn't listening to the people." And, everyone took a turn at pointing out to the Iraqis that democracy can be a bumpy road and that grass roots democracy ... as in Neighborhood Councils ... is not without its setbacks and challenges.

They also explained, as we are all wont to do with regularity, how diverse our community is, citing the number of different languages spoken in homes across LA and the number of different nations represented in our vast The military provided some funding, but it was quickly used up. Task forces were formed, townhalls were held and the Coalition folks provided some training. However, they noted, several of the instructions in the training weren't applicable to Iraq. Especially under today's conditions. In the early going, for

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Solar Program-Continued from page 2

For the first two years, the program helped to develop a Los Angeles-based solar industry composed of engineering, manufacturing, and contracting firms. Roughly nine Megawatts have been installed to date. However, during the September 2002 and February 2003 period, the SIP apparently approved a large number of "million dollar" rebate application ...far in excess of its budget authority. As a result, not only all of the available funds for rebates in FY02/03 were committed but also all of the FY03/04 and a portion of the FY04/05 funds as well.

In the meantime, new applications have been put on a waitlist, which has now grown to over 500 rebate requests, and the SIP ceased to function on a forward-going basis for the past 19 months.

Reluctant to Reform

DWP appears reluctant to reform the Solar Incentive Program in a manner that would make it sustainable and available to a broad cross-section of its customers. The current draft of the new guidelines would still result in 80% of funds going to large commercial projects leaving less than 20% for the residential and small commercial market. Since residential and small commercial applicants constitute two thirds of the waitlist, and approximately half of DWP's power revenue, DWP's plan still appears highly inequitable.

Also scheduled for retention is a provision that allows large projects to "double dip," securing not only DWP rebate funding but rebate funding from the California Public Utilities Commission's Self-Generation Program. This despite the fact that "double dipping" is acknowledged to be historically the biggest root cause of over-subscription and inequitable funding of the DWP Program.

NC's Should Weigh In

Despite their reluctance to reform, DWP acknowledges that it is appropriate for NC's (and residents and business people, in general) to weigh in on this issue. Four NC's have already passed a resolution in support of the SIP with the proviso that there be an equitable distribution of the funds across all customer segments.

A draft of the guidelines for FY04/05 is scheduled to be voted on at the next meeting of the DWP Board of Commissioners at 1:30 p.m. August 17.

(Peter Parrish is a neighborhood activist and the President of California Solar Engineering, Inc.

The DWP Board of Commissioners meets in Room 1555-H, 111 N. Hope Street. Neighborhood Councils may comment at the meeting or provide Community Impact Statement prior to the meeting: Fax 213.367.4990.) ■

Iraqi Delegates-Continued from Page 6

I was struck by how proud these visitors from the insurgency warfront were of the task they had taken on: to find a way to light the democratic fire in their country, from the ground up. "People are hungry," one of them said, "and we are absorbing quickly."

Think about it. No budget, no ENS system, no Empowerment Academy training, no funded outreach programs and a sizable number of stakeholders still worried about the price they might have to pay for speaking out. Somehow, it makes the NC challenge in LA seem like a cakewalk.

But it was the commonality of the experience and the shared challenges and road blocks that united the gathering at City Hall. As one Iraqi guest recounted, "A lot of people in Iraq demean Neighborhood Councils because they are only advisory." Now there's a connection we can all make. ■

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at present in need of job sites, play sites, school sites and trading sites, not just places to reside. These social infrastructure problems already contribute to diminishing public safety and youth that are ill prepared for college and decent jobs.

Space Wanted

The City of Manhattan Beach has the Pacific Ocean as a play area. But it developed Live Oak Park and outfitted it with a Playground Director, arguably keeping the young and old content and relatively trouble free. Live Oak Park is within reasonable walking distance from almost anywhere in the city. It doesn't infringe on business. It's not on a busy street. And, it provides activities which are physical, sedentary and contemplative.

Los Angeles' play areas developed differently. Earlier, schools were unfenced and the Central City had a number of vacant lots. Yards were also unfenced. Babe Didriksen the famous all-around athlete, practiced the hurdles by racing over neighbor's side-yard hedges.

Since then the City has grown and neighborhoods have become dense and intense and the space has disappeared. The accepted standard for sizing open space is one acre per thousand residents. It takes five acres for a playground director. Los Angeles has several large regional parks, but using the total acreage of those spaces inaccurately characterizes the adequacy of LA's recreational infrastructure and ignores the real space needs of neighborhoods

The School Deficiency Issue

Every poll of stakeholders puts school adequacy second only to public safety. To increase housing without adequate schools is inappropriate. Even though the LAUSD is currently in a massive building program, it admits that schools will not be adequate, even for the present. Moreover, creating enough schools for present and future students will require substantial funding, which, at the moment, is not even being contemplated.

Schools require large parcels of land, to comply with State structural standards, which brings us back to space.

The City is attempting to create parkland by using LAUSD school playgrounds. But, LAUSD cannot safely permit non-students on its grounds while school is in session. The better alternative is for the City to control recreational space, which may then be used by adjacent schools, non-exclusively and with school-employee supervision.

Social infrastructure is critical to the quality of life in a city the size of Los Angeles. Space, or the lack thereof, affects public safety, education and community attitudes that affect neighborhood upkeep and, therefore, property values.

LA can no longer ignore the social need for space and its affect on life quality without risking a volatile negative response and its standing as a world class city. ■

(Jim McQuiston is an East Hollywood activist and a Management Consultant.)

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