

Los Angeles Garment and Citizen

02/04/2003 "HCNC Meets; Toy Takes Seat"

The first meeting of the 33-seat board of governors of the Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council (HCNC) showed a group struggling through the controversy that had mired the process leading to its formation.

The first meeting featured two unexpected faces sitting among the board members: Don Toy and Danny Young. Both had been disqualified by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE)—but both were awarded their respective seats in last-minute decisions by the city agency.

Toy had previously been disqualified for failing to provide an address that proved his stakeholder status, according to DONE. He was awarded a Chinatown resident seat when he supplied an address that DONE considered valid.

Young was disqualified because he had allegedly run for two offices. He was awarded the Solano Canyon residents' seat when DONE found that he had properly withdrawn from the other race.

DONE stood by the rest of the decisions it had made on the elections, including the controversial move to distribute six seats representing nonprofit organizations among the six HCNC districts, which are Chinatown, Victor Heights/Forgotten Edge, Little Tokyo, Solano Canyon, El Pueblo, and the Arts District. Those seats were considered to be at-large positions at the time of the November 14th election for the HCNC board. But DONE subsequently redistributed the seats in response to a formal complaint by Chinatown commercial property owners' representative Kim Benjamin, who pointed out a clause in the bylaws that stated that the non-profit seats should be "distributed among all communities."

Discussion over the controversy dominated much of the first meeting of the HCNC board. Early in the meeting, Toy proposed that the floor be opened up to public comment, kicking down the door for a procession of protestors, including many of the disqualified candidates. One after another, they vented their ire at DONE

representatives and the newly elected board, competing with the buzz of simultaneous Mandarin and Cantonese translations, transmitted through DONE-provided headsets. Charges of anti-democratic practices and discrimination against Chinese/Americans filled the air, and many of the comments were followed by applause from the strongly partisan audience.

Many of the disqualified candidates had been a part of Toy's slate, and their supporters were out in force.

"90% of the people there were probably from Teen Post," said Toy, in reference to the nonprofit organization in Chinatown for which he serves as director. Teen Post works with both teenagers and elderly citizens in Chinatown, and both groups were well represented at the meeting. "There's always talk of wanting to be inclusive," Toy said. "But a lot of times that's only lip service." Toy pointed out that more than 60 people at the meeting needed translation into Toisan, a dialect of Chinese. DONE had provided headsets for simultaneous translation into Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, and Cantonese—but not Toisan.

Controversy over the redistribution of seats led to a greater discussion about the adoption of the HCNC bylaws. This step is a formality for most Neighborhood Councils, but some HCNC board members said they felt that the document should be amended before it was accepted, especially in light of the tempest surrounding the election process.

The bylaws had also not been translated into other languages, possibly preventing some stakeholders from reading them. At least two of the board members, Cam Lee and Hsien Linda Wang, followed the meeting through translation.

Some board members also said they had expected resistance to accepting by-laws as an outgrowth of the protest over the distribution of non-profit seats. Others said they believed the document, flawed as it may be, should be adopted. They suggested that an internal committee work to improve the document.

Representatives from DONE, including Rosara Young and Michelle Cuevas, reminded the board that it would not officially exist unless the bylaws were passed. The bylaws were finally passed by a vote of 18 to 9. Immediately afterwards the board decided to

form a seven-member bylaws committee to start educating the rest of the directors on the document, and improving it.

The next meeting of the HCNC board is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on February 11th at a location undetermined as of presstime. The agenda for the meeting has not yet been set, although one item calls for a full report from DONE regarding the HCNC election and subsequent response to complaints.

Also likely to be discussed are: the election of officers (one president, four vice presidents, a secretary and treasurer); the filling of the three remaining vacant seats (nonprofit representative for El Pueblo, Solano Canyon, and Victor Heights/Forgotten Edge); and the length of the terms for the board, which the bylaws do not specify.