

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

December 29, 2003 Volume 1 Issue 10 – Year in Review

CITY WATCH: THE YEAR THAT WAS 2003

What kind of a year was it? Depends on whom you ask. In this 2003 retrospective issue, City Watch offers some answers to that question from a variety of perspectives: From a valley stakeholder and board member, from inside City Hall, from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. While each perspective offers a different take on 2003, there does seem to be one reoccurring theme: Below the turmoil and the crises, Los Angeles experienced what Harris Telemacher calls, "a quiet revolution". And, its name was Neighborhood Councils.

City Watch: The Year That Was 2003. Give it a read. See if you agree. ■

CITY WATCH

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City Watch is published electronically on Monday of every other week. Share it with your Neighborhood Council and other activists.

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We welcome your comments!

City Hall 2003

Reflections on the Quiet Revolution

By Harris K. Telemacher

2003! Who could forget it? Me, for one. Given the quiet revolution occurring in the City, we may look back and say not much happened in Ole '03. On the other hand ...

The first half of the year, the local body politic was preoccupied with the pending departure of Council members Ruth Galanter, Hal Bernson and Nate Holden, much of the institutional memory of the Council. As a result of the 1993 term limits measure, the last of the old generation of Council members departed. This period is perhaps best symbolized by the attempt to change the name of Crenshaw Boulevard to Tom Bradley Boulevard. It marked the first occasion where official Neighborhood Council intervention pre-empted a council member's attempt to jam something through City Council.

The second issue, in which the weight of Neighborhood Councils tipped the scales, was the Police Commission's attempt to change the police response to home burglar alarms. While the police got most of what they wanted, they could not get it through City Council without first involving the Neighborhood Councils. It reaffirmed the process and the City Council's commitment to involving NC's.

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Perspectives

2004: Resolve and Relevance

By Ken Draper

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners certified an NC a week this year past. Neighborhood Councils now represent more than 3-million of LA's stakeholders. But those numbers, and the tumult that was City Hall, have been chronicled and reviewed elsewhere. This report is about tomorrow. About resolve and relevance.

Most of the folks involved with the NC movement are familiar with the more publicized examples of growing Neighborhood Council influence: The Crenshaw renaming, the security alarm issue, the amended HPOZ ordinance, come to mind. But the signs that the revolution is taking hold are in the day-to-day NC activity occurring under the radar.

A few weeks ago, a representative of one Neighborhood Council appeared at an ABC hearing and, claiming that the community had not had a chance to be heard yet, asked for a continuance. The hearing officer asked for the date of the next board meeting and continued the matter to the day following. No arguments. No negotiation. No line of supportive public speakers required. Not an action worthy of front page, above-the-crease, headlines perhaps, but it is symbolic of the growing recognition of Neighborhood Councils.

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2003: DONE Takes a Look Back

(The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment [DONE] oversees the LA System of Neighborhood Councils. Such a department was mandated in the City Charter. As a result of the City's budget crunch, DONE operated at roughly a 20% vacancy factor through 2003. DONE General Manager, Greg Nelson, provided this look back at 2003.)

- ◆The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners has certified 81 Neighborhood Councils to date. Fifty-one of these during 2003.
- ◆DONE was involved in 51 elections during 2003. Sixty-six NC's now have elected boards.
- ◆DONE has been busy trying to change the way government operates by creating special rules and programs for NC's. First was the Neighborhood Council Funding Program, which established a special process through which NC's could get and spend their \$50,000.
- ◆Arrangements were made for NC's to hire staff through the City's contract with a temporary employment agency.
- ◆The Office Space Procedures was approved by the City Council on December 2. An ordinance is being drafted, and it needs the City Council's approval, to finalize the new process, which will shorten the amount of time it will take NC's to lease office space from an optimistic four to six months to 30-45 days.

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Alliance Budget Summit

Greuel, Chick, Fujioka to Help Prepare NC's for the Upcoming Budget Battle

There are sexier issues. There are perhaps more contentious issues. But there is no issue more important to the City and Neighborhood Councils than the current LA budget mess.

In response to the current LA budget crisis, the Citywide Alliance of Neighborhood Councils has scheduled an NC Budget Summit for January 17. The Summit will clarify the seriousness of the budget issue, will pinpoint its affect on your Neighborhood Council and will provide direction on impacting the process and getting your voice heard.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, Controller Laura Chick and City Administrative Officer William Fujioka will be featured. They will examine the pitfalls ahead for the Governor's promised Vehicle License Fee replacement monies, the cuts the City will face in the upcoming short-term emergency six-month budget and the affects of all of this on NC neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Councils response to the LA budget crunch has, at best, been lethargic. Fed by disinterest, distrust and ignorance, NC's have yet to stick a toe in the muddied budget waters. Despite calls from City Council members for Neighborhood Councils to provide input and to help spread word of the City's budget woes to stakeholders, not a whimper has been heard.

Continued on page 3. See "Budget Summit"

Questions about the Alliance Budget Summit?

Visit www.allncs.org

Happy 2004!

Make it a Smart and Informed year. Make it a CITY WATCH year.

Add your name and e-add to the CW Network NOW!

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Get on the Net!

Voices

Word to the Valley: Get Involved

It is no real secret that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment was formed to assist in thwarting the secession desires of the San Fernando Valley. After Valley secession failed, the real question became what do we do now? Do we stand outside the system and throw rocks at it or would we, as a community, step inside the system and change it? I choose to believe that a Neighborhood Council must stand for something and not just stand against the City of Los Angeles.

Too often people decide not to get involved in the process. In order for the Neighborhood Councils to be relevant and have any credibility within the City of Los Angeles people simply must get involved. In our cry of "board rigging," one must remember that one voice on a board, or one voice at a microphone, cannot and will not change what a Neighborhood Council will do unless that is the only voice heard. Assigning several dedicated seats on a board essentially stops "board-rigging".

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I-Trac *Tracking the Issues-2004*

(Some of the things to watch for during the first quarter of 2004.)

- **Six-Month Emergency City Budget**
Next Budget & Finance-Jan 6
Next City Council-Jan 6
- **Anti-Patriot Act Resolution**
- **Newsrack Ordinance-Final**
- **Restraints on Big Box Retail Stores**
- **Public Works Funds Motion**
Funds distributed & influenced by NC's
- **Review of Allegations Against DONE**
Past President of BABCNC questions quality of support.
- **Controller's Audit of LAX Commissioners**
- **Motion to Stop City Commissioners from Political Fundraising**
- **Motion to Provide Regional Tele-conference Points for Participation in City Council Meetings**
- **NC Conflict of Interest Policy**
- **NC Election Policy**
- **Improvements in ENS System**

Budget Summit. Continued from page 2.

As one union official pointed out, "this kind of NC inaction begs the question of their relevance."

Department of Public Work's Greg Monfette pointed out recently that, because of budget cuts, the City's linier mileage for sidewalk repair has dwindled to 74 miles, which explains why busted and dangerous neighborhood sidewalks now go for years awaiting repair. He discussed the contradiction in the policy that installs handicap access curbs on the one hand and, on the other, leaves sidewalks in such disrepair that the wheelchair users can now get to the sidewalk at the corner but must wheel back into the street to avoid unpassable broken sidewalks.

These are budget issues. These are local issues. These are influence issues. And, issues, one must assume, that stakeholders elected their NC Boards to deal with. How do we explain, then, the absence of Neighborhood Councils at the budget crisis table?

Continued next column

CITY WATCH

Publication Dates: 2004

- ✦ January 12 ✦ January 26
- ✦ February 9 ✦ February 23
- ✦ March 8 ✦ March 22

DONE 2003. Continued from page 2.

✦The Community Impact Statement system was developed. Using fax or e-mail, NC's can have their official positions printed on the agendas of the City Council and its committees. Most likely this has never been done before anywhere in the nation.

✦NC leaders and city staff joined together to present 16 recommendations to the City Council to improve the City's Early Notification System. Those recommendations are working their way through the committee system and to the City Council.

✦A Congress of Neighborhoods was held on April 5, and attracted over 1,000 Neighborhood Council leaders. They took part in 47 workshops. The second Congress was held on November 1. This half-day session attracted over 600 NC leaders and launched the Empowerment Academy, a year-round training program.

✦Neighborhood Councils participated in the first Budget Day and the budget prioritizing meetings that followed. For the first time, the Mayor invited the NC's to have the same access to him, as he develops the city budget, as the departments do.

✦Channel 35, the City's cable station, offered to televise NC programming, and cablecast lists of NC meetings, at a regular time during their broadcast schedule.

✦The City offered to make NC agendas available to the public, by subscription, through the Early Notification System just like the City Council agendas. ■

Continued from previous column

The Alliance Budget Summit is a must for every NC activist. The budget distributes resources throughout the City. It is every neighborhood's concern. In the weeks just ahead, there are going to be winners and losers. Don't be a loser. Don't become irrelevant. Attend the Summit, then educate and prepare your neighborhood for the upcoming budget debate. ■

Citywide Alliance Budget Summit

January 17, 2004

9:30 a.m.

Faculty Lounge-LACC

(Vermont just north of Melrose)

Visit website (www.allncc.org) for directions/parking instructions

Revolution. Continued from page 1

A contentious budget process capped the end of the fiscal year in May. The Mayor wanted to set aside money for 350 additional officers. Amid name calling and arm twisting, the City Council, lead by Budget and Finance committee Chair Nick Pacheco, claimed the City didn't have the cash for cops. The Mayor and Chief Bratton put on a full court press but the Council held its ground.

Nick's Last Hurrah

The budget was Nick Pacheco's last Council hurrah. He was defeated in his reelection bid by Antonio Villaraigosa. That election of the former Assembly Speaker and mayoral aspirant, along with the election of former police chief Bernard Parks, was widely viewed as a defeat for the Mayor and trouble for his relationship with the Council.

Generally speaking, mayoral/council relations have remained good but fragile. One looming issue, for example, is the Mayor's proposal to modernize LAX. Sides are already being taken around the Mayor's proposal. Organized labor, the Los Angeles Chamber and some of the airlines are backing the Mayor. Local Neighborhood Councils, the Council member for the district, Cindy Miscikowski, and other airlines, oppose the plan as drafted. Meanwhile, recent charges of "pay to play" cronyism in Airport Contracting practices have been raised by the City Controller, adding fuel to the fires.

Lap-Dancing Losers

One of the interesting diversions that left many scratching their heads with disbelief, was the time and energy invested in the effort to ban lap dancing. The makeup of the City Council is probably more progressive than any of its predecessors. Ludlow, Garcetti and Villaraigosa have strong bona fides as civil libertarians. Villaraigosa once chaired the ACLU. Many other Council members likely consider themselves left of center. Yet the lap-dancing ban sailed through council without one dissenting vote or a single question as to the impact of this ordinance on civil liberties.

Meanwhile, the Gentleman's Club owners circulated petitions to have a ballot referendum on the matter and collected twice the number of signatures required. The council hastily repealed the ordinance, fearing among other things that the city would be subject to Tonight Show barbs that would divert attention away from other issues. Ironic, considering that pornography is a major contributor to the local economy.

Emergency Budget

As summer moved into fall, the California budget crisis and the gubernatorial recall election took center stage. The debate over the Vehicle License Fee, and local government's lack of control over its revenues, has lead to a major crisis for the City. So far the Mayor and Council are working closely together. Shortly after the first of the year, a new six-month budget will be released that may include lay-offs and dramatic reductions in services. The outcome of this process will likely set the tone for the year and the stage for the Mayor's reelection effort.

Just below the radar has been the growth of certified Neighborhood Councils. The growing strength of the councils surfaces only occasionally. Mayor Hahn's commitment to the NC's, and the general decentralization of city services to the neighborhood city halls, is making an impact on community perceptions of City responsiveness. It would appear, that beneath the turmoil, grows a quiet revolution. ■

Perspectives. Continued from page 1

From San Pedro to Woodland Hills. From larger battles ... like opposing the Mayor's LAX expansion plan ... to the smaller fights ... like cutting through City red tape to get a median landscaped ... empowered NC's are making their presence felt. Harris Telemacher calls it "the quiet revolution".

Continued next column

Voices. Cont from page 2.

Maybe when the City of Los Angeles was scrambling to avert secession, they never perceived the Neighborhood Council System as having any power. However, the Neighborhood Council System has taken on a life of its own.

Bad things happen when good people do nothing. The Neighborhood Council System is far from perfect, but if Valley residents want to change it they need to get off their collective rear ends, open up the Daily News, locate the council meeting in their area, and make their voices heard. The decisions are made by those who show up. I hope that every valley stakeholder chooses to show up to their Neighborhood Council meetings. If they do, that thunder city hall hears, will be the will of the people, and thunder can only be ignored so long before lightning strikes.

-Jim Alger

Northridge West NC

(Letters to Voices may be edited for clarity and/or brevity. We welcome your views. Send to: CW Voices at sirken323@aol.com.)

Continued from previous column

Councilwoman, Janice Hahn, says, "Neighborhood Councils are not an experiment."

For NC's, 2004 is less about resolutions and more about resolve. And, there are at least a couple of reasons. For some, the years of tension and contention, leading up to certification, take their toll. The will to stay in the fray withers. For others, getting certified was, in itself, the reward. The result is let down.

The great bulk of NC's are now in post-certification mode, discovering that the important work is yet to come: maintaining outreach, actually serving constituents, maintaining or creating relevance and finding their place in the great NC constellation. Now is the time for resolve and recommitment, else the real reasons the NC work was begun will be lost. As the commercial says, "It's your future. Be there." ■