

# Northeast Observer

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## Greg Nelson Must Go

Done Leadership Not Up to the Task

In June 1996, amid great expectations, seven city councilmembers, all since long gone from the city chamber, signed the original motion creating the system of neighborhood councils. It is a document worth reading.

Its powerful text summons up visions of a different LA, our own Shangri-LA, perhaps. It reads, "Envision Los Angeles being turned into a Family of Neighborhoods, a family in which everyone participates and everyone takes pride" And, "We need to unite Angelenos of every race and color and creed, and rebuild this city - not from the top down, but from the bottom up" With over 70 neighborhood councils now certified, and another 30 or so in line, it is clear that the idea resonated with a great many city residents who felt that participation in city elections wasn't enough. For them, a cross next to a candidate's name every four years didn't guarantee a voice in or a receptive ear at local government. Quick to recognize this sentiment, an early supporter of neighborhood councils and the motion's presenter, then Councilmember Joel Wachs, pinpointed this frustration in the document's first sentence. It reads: "If there's one clear message throughout the city, it's that people want to be heard." Wachs was assisted by his then Chief of Staff, Greg Nelson, the man who now oversees the development of neighborhood councils from his current position of General Manager at the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, known affectionately as DONE to "stakeholders," the name given for members of the neighborhood councils.

Mr. Nelson (motto: Losers make excuses) is an aloof man rarely finding the time to acknowledge a neighborhood council leader or get involved in the problems facing those running a neighborhood council. Nelson is a man who focuses on

the big picture while many neighborhood councils are going down in flames grappling with the complexities of the Brown Act, accusations of fraudulent elections and growing disenchantment in general (as few as two people turned out for a recent Northeast neighborhood council meeting).

In the Northeast, DONE's handling of the situation has only exacerbated the turmoil within the Arroyo Seco Neighborhood Council. While encouraging extensive debate of bylaw changes, the oversight agency quickly deemed it unnecessary when the outcome wasn't to its liking. In a dispute between members of the Glassell Park Neighborhood Council, DONE is clearly perceived as partisan in the ongoing mediation attempts.

While others clamor for a public investigation of DONE, a self-serving gesture not with the best interests of neighborhood councils at heart, we believe a thorough housecleaning of the department, including Nelson's departure, is urgently needed. Too many DONE project coordinators are seen to be showing favoritism and are believed to be pursuing their own agendas.

Joel Wachs' idea, strongly supported by our current Mayor, James K. Hahn, was nothing less than a plan to fundamentally reform city government. Unfortunately, neither Nelson nor many of his top officials are up to the task.