

Taking Inventory

Homelessness Tops Neighborhood Council Agenda

By Heidi Hardt

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Attendees of last Tuesday's Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (DLANC) meeting put homelessness at the top of their list of priorities for Mayor Jim Hahn to address in this year's budget. Council and community members assembled nine items, five of which will be passed on to the City Council as suggestions to receive city funding. Most who attended the meeting at the Department of Water and Power argued that the city should put more dollars into homeless services.

"Los Angeles ranks among the lowest in the country in terms of money put towards homeless services and shelters," said Victor Franco Jr., vice president of government affairs for the Central City Association. "New York spends close to \$76 million on homeless services. We rank below Minneapolis."

The council collected more than 200 surveys from Downtown residents, business owners and workers which suggested improvements or programs for the area. The neighborhood council board will present the five priorities to the City Council on Tuesday.

Neighborhood councils citywide will compete to have their line-items included on Hahn's agenda. However, only five will receive funding.

"We need to be able to sell something from Downtown that's going to help the whole city and we have to get them to buy into what we're putting down," said Douglas Wance, president of DLANC.

The priorities were organized into three categories: homelessness, residential and economic development issues. For the homeless, community members sought more funding for shelters and services. They also asked for the city to fulfill its promise to use a \$100 million housing trust fund to create affordable housing.

"Everything that improves affordable housing decreases homelessness. Whether the city is going to keep its commitment to that \$100 million is a very, very big budget issue," said Gene Boutilier, an organizer for the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness (LACEHH).

According to LACEHH, as many as 85,000 people in Los Angeles County go homeless every night.

Wance said that helping the homeless would also further development in Downtown by bringing more investment and attracting tourists.

Another issue, said Don Garza, a member of DLANC, is the inefficient bus routes that tend to run north and south, avoiding key shopping areas such as the Toy and Jewelry districts.

"People in L.A. don't want to walk somewhere far away. But they'll put a quarter in something if they know they can get there relatively quickly," Wance said.

He said residents could shop and visitors could see the sites more quickly if the DASH expanded its routes east and west. One of the nine line-items asks for exactly that.

The other five line-items include: construction of a Convention Center hotel; funding for

a Gallery Row; more efficient street cleaning; an increase in policing; and the revival of the Downtown Construction Management Committee, which would regulate events and filming on city streets.