

April 18, 2005

Letter to the Editor – The Argonaut

LA DONE general manager Nelson urges “a good election” to fix Venice Grass Roots

There is nothing wrong with the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council that a good election couldn't fix. At least that seemed to be the thinking of the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners when it rejected the idea of decertifying the troubled neighborhood council, and instead gave the go-ahead to series of meetings in Venice at which the next election would be designed by the community.

With their board of directors unable to meet since the Final Decision Maker of the challenges to their last election invalidated the whole election, there were few choices left for this neighborhood council that had gone dead in the water.

At the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment we have given our opinions about how this disaster could have been avoided, but every neighborhood council has the right to be goofy and make mistakes.

We see this new election as an opportunity for Venice to do it right this time. But that will involve finding people who represent the diversity of the area to run for office, and for everyone to vote in the election. Democracy can provide the solution.

To say that Venice is diverse is to understate the obvious. The idea of neighborhood councils was to create a public forum where those who represent all of the different ideas and priorities could sit together as peers and discuss the issues of the day. It doesn't even matter all that much if they don't take a vote. The idea is to get more people involved in their community.

Given its history, any lopsided votes on controversial issues would probably be dismissed anyway as bogus.

Instead of fighting from across the room at public meetings, they would sit together, understand what divides them, and try and discover that which would unite them. A great place for idealists. The wrong place for street fighters.

What Venice needs is a few leaders who will focus on what's best for Venice, and sincerely encourage and value other points of view. When the focus is on winning or losing in the world of neighborhood councils, everyone loses.

When one side sets out to dominate the discussion or all seats on the board of directors, the group's credibility is destroyed because legitimate voices have been silenced.

Those who want to get involved in shaping the new, and hopefully improved, Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council, can keep up with the happenings by reading the Argonaut, checking our website at www.lacityneighborhoods.com, or subscribing to our electronic newsletter through the website or through an e-mail message to done@mailbox.lacity.org.

Greg Nelson

General Manger, Department of Neighborhood Empowerment