



an insider look at city hall

CITYWATCH

citywide edition

November 17, 2005
Volume 3 Issue 18

CityWatch Today—The lead today deals with an issue important to all of us: Campaign Reform. With the ever-increasing cost of campaigning giving distinct advantage to millionaire candidates and special interest groups, it is critical that some solution be found. Whether the answer is the Greuel proposal (see lead story on this page) is open to debate. We offer some opinion and analysis on Page 2.

There's more: The E & N has agreed to agendize the Council File Number Proposal; the BONC is pondering smaller Councils; we profile the G & L Caucus and track city issues for you. We also take a positive look at NC success in Perspective (this page).

There will be no CityWatch next week. We wish you a meaningful Thanksgiving and will see you again in two weeks.

Thank you for stopping by.
--Editor

“Clean Money”

City Council Cracks the Door on a Campaign Reform Measure

Public money would pay for candidate campaigns

By Sara Epstein

The City Council stuck its toe in the “clean money” water this week and approved a study on the feasibility of a campaign reform measure for LA. Councilwoman Wendy Greuel’s proposal calls for full public funding of the political campaigns of elected city officials. She was joined on the motion by Councilmembers Rosendahl and Garcetti.

This could be the first step toward a so-called “clean money” bill that would ultimately be presented to city voters. The objective of public financing is to level the playing field for candidates, make the campaigns more open and informative and to at least reduce the influence of special interests. Some of the cities that have adopted similar systems, though early in the process, say it has “dramatically improved the level of civic discourse.”

Greuel says, “We need campaign finance reform to restore integrity and honesty into our election process. By taking money out of elections, candidates will be forced to go directly to the people.”

Rosendahl agrees, “Campaigns should be about people and issues, not financial muscle.”

See Page 7. “Campaign Reform”

Analysis and Insight on this reform proposal: See Page 2.

Say What?

Happy Thanksgiving



CITYWATCH

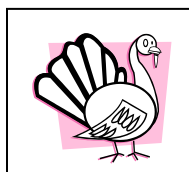


Perspective

10 Reasons for NCs to be Thankful

By Ken Draper

Attending a Board of Neighborhood Commissioner’s meeting can be depressing. Like visiting an emergency room. Or, hanging around a police station. Most of the experience is littered with whining, complaints and stories of struggling, inept councils. And, with Commissioners telling us how much they think has to be done to shape this wonderful process up. The experience can be disheartening. And, misleading.



I think it should be mandatory that the BONC folks schedule at least one positive agenda item each meeting. Review the incredible progress that LA’s Neighborhood Councils ... and the NC System ... have made over the past four years. In addition, Commissioners should be made to get out in the ‘hood. Attend NC board meetings. See for themselves the amazing work the councils are doing.

See Page 8. “Perspective”

Analysis**Reform: It's About Who Wins, Loses**

By Mark Siegel

There is no objective standard to judge political reform. All reform should be evaluated based on who benefits and who loses. If you are on the side that benefits, its good reform. If you're on the side that loses, its bad reform. Three incumbent City Council members proposed to restore integrity and honesty to the election process. Maybe we are talking about perceptions, but I consider all three to have integrity and honesty in a highly regulated political environment policed by the city Ethics Commission.

The proposal for publicly funded campaigns will probably not change power relationships in the city. In an era of term limits, the city's elected officials will still look towards city staff and lobbyists for insight into the issues. City employee unions, that have the capacity to turn out walkers and phoners, will continue to be important players, and, perhaps, become more powerful. Neighborhood Councils will be as powerful as they are today. If they do their outreach and have broad participation, they will be players. If they do not have support from their communities, they will be ignored.

See Page 7. "Analysis"

♦♦♦♦

Opinion**Campaign Reform: Why Clean Money Will Soon Turn Dirty.**

By Brady Westwater

Clean money through public financing is a fantasy.

First, any candidate (particularly millionaires) can opt out and put those who take public money at a disadvantage. In addition, independent expenditures – protected by the First Amendment – are still legal and special interest groups will still be able to spend millions to elect 'clean' candidates. I repeat, 'clean' candidates will still be able to get millions of dollars in special interest money 'independently' spent to get them elected.

But there is one larger problem no one will talk about.

Any special interest group can easily raise enough \$5 contributions to qualify a candidate who has no independent support. Those candidates will then be able to abuse the system by promoting their cause – and have us pay their bills.

No Way to Stop Special Interests

Animal right's or immigration or abortion groups – will be able to get public funds to promote their special interests under the guise of an election. And there is no way to stop this, just as there is no way to stop special interest groups from running expensive independent campaigns for supposedly 'clean' candidates. Granted these problems have not yet developed, but only because clean money does not exist in expensive media markets and has not been around long enough to develop these flaws.

But it is inevitable these problems will develop.

So clean money – will quickly become far dirtier than anything this country has ever seen. Except, this time, we will be the ones paying for it. (Brady Westwater is a political writer and contributor to CityWatch. He is the President of the Downtown LA Neighborhood Council.) ■

CITYWATCH

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

November 17, 2005
Volume 3 Issue 18

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CITYWATCH
DELIVERY

**There will be no
CityWatch the week of
November 21.**

**Next CityWatch:
December 1**

Happy Thanksgiving!



Profile**NC Gay & Lesbian Caucus:
Fostering Civic Participation**

By Jason Lyon

As Neighborhood Councils have matured, participants have discovered both the possibilities and the limitations in our role as "advisor" to the city. In seeking to more fully realize the goal of neighborhood empowerment, many NC members have found it advantageous to expand their Council's reach by forming partnerships with counterparts across the city. These partnerships have taken a variety of forms: citywide associations such as the Issues Group, as well as regional associations like the Northeast Coalition or the Citywide Alliance.

NC Working Groups

A partial list of Neighborhood Council taskforce groups, organizations and alliances currently active in Los Angeles

- Citywide Alliance of NCs
- Valley Alliance of NCs
- No East Coalition
- Gay & Lesbian Caucus
- LANC Congress Taskforce
- NC Leadership Coalition
- NC EP Network
- NC/PlanningMOU Taskforce
- NC/DWPOversight Committee
- Citywide Issues Group

There are a number of other regional NC coalitions and some looser NC groups that meet under the auspices of their City Council Member.

In at least one instance, a partnership has arisen out of the desire to protect and nurture minority participation in the Neighborhood Council process. The LANC Gay & Lesbian Caucus is a coalition of NC board members, city employees, and stakeholders whose goal is "to encourage, foster, promote and support civic participation" by the City's GLBT stakeholders.

Meeting Since 2003

The brainchild of Studio City NC member Paul Waters, the Caucus first met at the November, 2003 Congress of Neighborhoods. That session drew approximately two dozen participants (both gay and straight) who exchanged ideas about promotion of, and barriers to, civic engagement by the gay and lesbian community. The caucus mailing list has since grown to more than 60 subscribers who exchange information via email and at bimonthly meetings.

An impressive array of city leaders has taken part in past sessions. All five of the major candidates for mayor – Villaraigosa, Hahn, Parks, Hertzberg and Alarcon — participated in individual meetings with the caucus. These discussions covered not only issues of particular interest to the GLBT community, but also more general questions about neighborhood empowerment and citywide concerns such as education and traffic.

Hahn Plays Host to G&L Caucus

The LANC G&L met with Bill Rosendahl and Greg Nelson, and hosted a fascinating session on Scientology and the NC System. Most recently, Councilmember Janice Hahn hosted the Caucus in her district.

Currently, Caucus members are considering the role of NCs in responding to a number of proposed ballot initiatives confronting gay and lesbian families. The measures would amend the California Constitution to prohibit marriage equality for same sex couples, while also rescinding the rights, responsibilities and protections of domestic partnership.

The next meeting of the Caucus will be held in early 2006.

(Jason Lyon is Chair of the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council's Government Affairs Committee and the mover behind the NC City Council File Number Proposal.) ■

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CITYWATCH**The News That Was ...****E & N Agrees to Agendize
Council File Number Proposal**

Bill Rosendahl, the Education and Neighborhoods Committee Chair, agreed this week to finally agendize the NC Council File Number Proposal. Persuaded by a number of Neighborhood Council representatives at the meeting, Rosendahl asked the Chief Legislative Analyst to assemble the submissions to date and prepare a report for an E & N agenda early in December.

The Proposal asks that Neighborhood Councils be allowed to request City Council file numbers as city departments and City Council members have the right to do. It has been languishing in committee since last June. Partially because of changed committee assignments, but mostly because Chairman Rosendahl had been disinclined to agendize it. In the meantime, 37 NCs have submitted Community Impact Statements in support of the motion.

•••

**BONC Flirts with Idea of Smaller NCs
and Fewer Posting Locations**

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners flirted with the idea of smaller Neighborhood Councils and fewer agenda posting locations. In the end, it appeared that neither was likely to change much in the near future.

The BONC, while wondering if smaller NCs might not be more effective, decided it needed much more information before it opened up the size-of-Neighborhood-Councils can of worms.

They left the minimum five posting locations in place, apparently because they thought it to be the one definable outreach requirement in their arsenal.

Only one posting is required by the Brown Act. The idea of a minimum of five postings is the result of Certification Policy.

•••

City Says No to Strip Club; Court Says OK

An Appeals Court panel upheld the City's right to deny a Tarzana strip club a permit for operating within 500 feet of a residential area.

The case is long-running. The first request for exemption from the code was made in 1999. ■

**CITYWATCH
DayPlanner****Citywide Alliance**

Saturday, November 19 (9:30 a.m.)

Info: www.Allncs.org**NC/DWP Budget Workshop**

Saturday, November 19, (1 p.m.)

DWP-Hope and 1st Streets

DWP presents early budget to NCs

Info: www.LADWP.com**NC/DWP Oversight Committee**

Saturday, November 19 (3 p.m. approx)

DWP-Portland Room

Hope and 1st Streets(Info: www.mouoversight.org)**City Council**

Tuesday, Wednesday (Only)

November 22, 23 (10 a.m.)

City Hall

Education & Neighborhoods

November 23-Canceled

Public Safety

November 21-Canceled

San Pedro NC Committee

Port Security & Safety

Tuesday, November 22 (6 p.m.)

Info: lonnac@bgclaharbor.org

310.833.1322 x242

Street Lighting Museum

Thursday, December 1 (11 a.m.)

Info: 213.847.6400



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CITYWATCH: KNOW MORE

CITYWATCH I-TRAC**Tracking the Issues**

Sex Offenders—City Attorney has been asked for recommendations for preventing the illegal over-concentration of registered sex offenders in facilities located near residential communities. **(05-0329)**

•••

City Ordinances in Spanish—City Clerk has been asked for feasibility and cost of translating City ordinances into Spanish ... and other relevant languages. **(05-1684)**

•••

Identifying Donations to Departments—Councilman LaBonge has asked a dozen or so departments to identify and inventory all entities that provide support funds. **(04-0260)**

•••

DRP Asked to Respond to Audit—The Department of Recreation and Parks has been asked to respond to the unflattering audit just released by the City Controller. DRP has also been asked, in the face of charges that their fees have not been fair, to a report on the police and procedure for setting fees for the City's Rec & Park programs and services. **(05-2457-S1)(05-2457-S3)**

•••

Fee Waivers—Placing some limitations on Special Event fee-waivers ... now a common and costly practice in City Council. **(05-2467)**

•••

Wilshire Blvd Curbside Bus Lanes—Request from Department of Transportation for report on the necessary steps to remove the curbside bus-only lanes from Wilshire Blvd (between Federal and Centinela) until other communities have agreed to allow the lanes to run all the way from Downtown to Santa Monica, **(03-2337-S1)**

•••

DOT: Talk to Me—Wendy Greuel has instructed the Department of Transportation to report in 30 days on a communications plan that would allow DOT to provide real-time information to commuters, along with what potential technologies would allow commuters to communicate with DOT. **(05-2477)**

•••

Nuisance and Eyesores—Greig Smith has asked Building and Safety to look into enforcing the Municipal code regarding uncompleted single family homes in the SF Valley that have old building permits and have become nuisances and eyesores in the community. **(05-2390)**

*(You can check the details of these motions by visiting the City's website [www.lacity.org] and clicking on Council File Index. The **emboldened** number at the end of each item above is the **File Index Number**.)* ▣

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November 19 at 9:30 a.m.

Citywide Alliance Neighborhood Councils Agenda

- **DONE GM, Greg Nelson**
Answers questions from audience
- **State Senator Richard Alarcon**
NC Vision and influencing public policy
- **City Councilman Greig Smith**
Renew LA (trash collection/landfills)

7-9-1-3-10-8-2-4-6-5-

CityWatch ...

... by the Numbers

(A statistical status report on some of the ongoing citywide Neighborhood Council activities at deadline.)

LA Neighborhood Council Congress

(Last 60 days-15 NCs have ratified the Proposed Charter)

- Arroyo Seco
- Atwater Village
- Bel Air Beverly Crest
- Central San Pedro
- Coastal San Pedro
- Downtown Los Angeles
- Granada Hills North
- Historic Highland Park
- Mar Vista
- Mid City WEST
- Reseda
- Tarzana
- Westside
- Winnetka
- Woodland Hills-Warner Center



Planning MOU

(RSVPs to first citywide Presidents/Land Use chairs meeting on December 3)

21



NC/DWP MOU

(Councils that have signed onto the NC/DWP MOU)

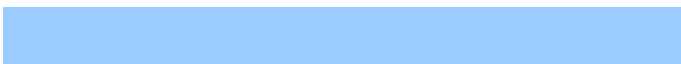
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NC File Number Proposal

(Have forwarded Community Impact Statements of support)

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**CityWatch
Future Assignments**

- ◆ Union Wants City Workers Protected
Concerned about safety, policies in Department of Animal Services
- ◆ A Look at the New BONC
The reformers, the conformers, the undecided
- ◆ South LA NC Activist
Notes from her diary
- ◆ Warm & Fuzzy Holiday Issue
Coming December 21
- ◆ The City Through a 2006 Prism
Comprehensive CityWatch Year-ahead issue

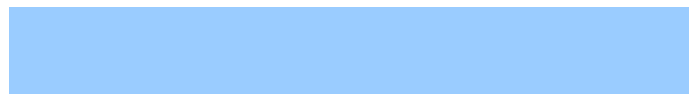
**Next CityWatch: December 1 ...
...ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU!**

CORRECTION

(On November 3, CityWatch ran a story—"Zine Tries to Control Shopping Cart Plague." The story was incorrect, in that it attributed the motion—04-0840—and the 12th District to Councilman Zine instead of Councilman Greig Smith. Smith, in fact, was the mover of the motion and, in fact, is City Councilman for the 12th District. See the corrected story below.)

Smith Tries to Control Shopping Cart Plague

Most folks in most neighborhoods recoil at the thought of abandoned shopping carts strewn about the community. Councilman Greig Smith is attempting to do something about it. He's championing a pilot program in his own 12th District that puts the responsibility for controlling this cart blight on the businesses to whom the carts belong. Under the plan offered by the Bureau of Streets, the City would monitor the neighborhood for carts left abandoned on the public right-of-way. Responsible businesses would have 24 hours to retrieve their cart before it is impounded. Both the Reseda and the Winnetka NCs have provided Impact Statements of support. ▣



Campaign Reform-From Page 1.

Here's the way it would work: A set amount of public funding would be provided qualified candidates who demonstrate a base of support. Candidates, who opt into the system and qualify, would agree to limit their spending and reject contributions from private sources. They would be required to raise a set number of five-dollar donations and signatures of support.

However, this is a voluntary system and candidates will remain free to reject public funds and use the more traditional practice of raising private funds if they choose. Critics point to this as one of the proposal's flaws, but supporters counter that the Greuel plan is an alternative, not an overhaul. Some have also questioned where the estimated \$25-million to these campaigns would come from.

"Great Day"

"This is a great day for the people of Los Angeles," in the words of Controller Laura Chick, "On the heels of the \$250-million special election fiasco last week, our City is leading the way in California to reform the broken and money soaked system we now have."

The City's Chief Legislative Analyst will consult with the Mayor, the Californian Clean Money Campaign, and others, and report back to the City Council in 90 days.

Neighborhood Councils can't endorse candidates, of course, but they can weigh in on this campaign reform proposal. Monitoring the city's budget and holding elected officials accountable are responsibilities that fall under the NC umbrella. (*The Chief Legislative Analyst, City Clerk, City Administrative Officer, the Mayor, the City Council and California Clean Money Campaign are all points-of-influence during this 90-day study*) ■

Analysis-From Page 2

There are two areas where the intent of the proposed measure could run into problems, vanity campaigns and independent expenditures. The First Amendment protects the right of a wealthy individual to spend his or her own money at any level to support their candidacy (e.g. Richard Riordan). If a wealthy candidate decides to spend \$10 million, is the city willing to publicly fund the other candidates to keep them competitive? The only sanction is that the self funded vanity candidate will not receive taxpayer funds.

There are also Constitutional issues in regulating independent expenditures. Wealthy individuals, businesses and unions have a right to spend their money in support or opposition of a candidate. There are prohibitions against forming a political committee for independent expenditures. But a committee needs at least two members, if you go it alone you are free to spend your money independently.

Minor Candidates Out of Touch

Lastly, some may see this proposal as a method of transforming minor candidates into major candidates by equalizing the funds that they receive. Some question the wisdom here. Minor candidates lack support because they are out of touch with the electorate. Open council seats will draw as many as 10 or 15 candidates. How does the city determine who is a serious candidate and to what level do they get funded?

I may be a little out of fashion, but if we're going to create campaign reform, let's look for a system that actually improves over the one it replaces. (*Mark Siegel is a former political consultant and the founder of CityWatch.*) ■

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Perspective-From Page 1.

In the meantime, this being Thanksgiving and all, I offer the Commissioners some positive input. Ten reasons why the Neighborhood Council system is already a success. Alive and well. And, working.

1. Eighty-seven Neighborhood Councils have been certified since December, 2001. That's roughly 22 a year. One every two weeks. To date, only one has been recommended for decertification. When you think of the time it takes to prepare for certification, the numbers of dedicated people required and the travel and hours invested by the Commissioners and an often depleted DONE staff, that's remarkable.
2. Of those 87, there are 50 valid, semi-robust, working councils that tending to NC business, provide a voice for their communities, participate in citywide issues activities and are helping their stakeholders eliminate graffiti, cut crime, build youth centers, eliminate traffic bottlenecks, working with schools, dealing with land use matters, planting trees and landscaping street medians. (There are another 20 still pulling it together and there are 10 or 15 that are dysfunctional. This ratio of success to dysfunction, by the way, could be applied to U.S. cities, City Council offices, City departments and City Commissions.)
3. Neighborhood Councils have found their citywide empowerment voice. Evidence: the NC/DWP MOU, the opposition to the renaming of Crenshaw Blvd, the forming NC Congress, the derailing of the Reyes Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, 37 Impact Statements in support of the Council File Number Proposal. A partial list.
4. NCs are now a part of the landscape at City Council, committee and commission meetings ... where there are issues of interest to them.
5. Lots of Neighborhood Councils have figured out the system and have established working relationships with their City Council representatives and city departments.
6. NCs supported their own Mayoral Debates.
7. There is never a day, and hardly an issue, before City Council these days that doesn't include, in some form, Neighborhood Council participation.
8. Neighborhood Councils have learned to partner with other community organizations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, residential associations, non-profits, religious and educational groups.

Next Column

Adv

"#1 Flea Market
in Los Angeles!"
-New Times BEST OF LA

The Melrose Trading Post
Antiques & Collectibles Market

"LA's Hottest Scene!"
-Los Angeles Magazine



From previous column

9. Neighborhood Councils are, in fact, participating in the Mayor's budget process, monitoring the delivery of City services and promoting citizen participation in government, as the Charter mandates. It may not always be as pretty and organized as we would like. Democracy, as they say, is a messy business. But, it is nonetheless happening. Right now. Under the current system.
10. One survey reported that nearly 40% of the City's stakeholders interviewed were aware of Neighborhood Councils. That's likely better than some City Council districts.

Perhaps the best argument for the success of Neighborhood Councils is one we've offered here before.

If you rescinded the Charter tomorrow, withdrew the city funding and the DONE, at least 25 Councils would form an empowerment coalition and continue to provide a voice for their neighborhoods at City Hall.

So, BONC ... Neighborhood Councils ... what's not to be thankful for? ■

Happy Thanksgiving



CITYWATCH