



an insider look at city hall

CITYWATCH

citywide edition

December 29, 2005
Volume 3 Issue 23

CityWatch Today—This issue of CityWatch is about what Neighborhood Councils and the City can look forward to ... prepare for ... in 2006.

A number of leaders believe this is a year of risk for Neighborhood Councils. Much to accomplish. Much that could fail and permanently alter the perception of neighborhood influence.

This CityWatch ponders these concerns and offers you a look at 2006 through the eyes of DONE, unions, the State, USC researchers ... and more. We hope you find it thought provoking and helpful.

As for CityWatch-2006 ... the word is continued expansion. Of the website, issues tracking, staff, services, television, forums, investigation and viewpoints. The things you need to understand the issues and challenges facing grassroots LA and its full and risky agenda.

But then, to paraphrase: No risk. No gain. We prefer to look forward to the incredible possibilities in 2006. And, to facing the challenges with you.

--Editor

**Happy
New
Year!**



*“Los Angeles is a
Metropolis of possibilities”*

--Instructor
Kennedy Tap Co.
LA County Holiday Event

--CITYWATCH

Perspective-2006

NCs Take Heavy Agenda into Year of Challenge and Risk

By Ken Draper

LA's Neighborhood Councils plunge into 2006 with a packed agenda and a lot on the line. The new year will be full of challenge ...and, risk. And, the question looms: are they up to it?

2 NCs face numerous critical issues: The newly formed Neighborhood Council Congress, the Charter-mandated Review Commission, an attempt to establish an NC Emergency Preparedness Network, the Council File Number proposal, a Planning Department MOU. The volume and importance of this agenda leaves councils vulnerable and open to failure. And, at a time when the NC concept will be more than ever under scrutiny.

The maturity and dedication of Council activists will be challenged. Their understanding of the difference between volunteerism and commitment will be tested. What priority they give to grassroots democracy and civic engagement, in their DayRunners and on their “To-Do” lists, will have to be answered. This is the year that will answer: Did the empowerment shot take?

No Clout

In addition to the heavy issues load, Neighborhood Councils also face a new administration that has yet to be convinced that NCs do ... or will ever ... carry much clout. For the most part, this Mayor sees NCs as a bottom-feeder layer of government. A condition attached to his job, hard to ignore altogether because they were Charter spawned, but not a potent constituency that can either help or hurt him much. Like, say, unions or business or other power brokers.

Pothole Police

Supporting his Pothole Project and Days of Service ... or, creating a neat little neighborhood emergency preparedness program ... is more in line with Mayor Villaraigosa's perspective on Neighborhood Councils. Thus, it would seem, demonstrating that there really is power in neighborhood empowerment and that NCs have the ability ... and the will ... to influence votes and outcomes looms large on the 2006 Neighborhood Council agenda.

**2006
NC Agenda**

- Review Commission
- LANCC
- NC EPN
- Council File Numbers
- Planning MOU
- NC Borders
- New Planning Director

See Page 10. “Perspective”

**Inside: The Mayor • Greg Nelson • Ron Deaton • USC
The State • Julie Butcher • 2006 Assignments**

Looking Forward ... 2006

Being the Best They Can Be: Will LA's NCs be Up to It?

By Greg Nelson

The new year will take us into another important phase in the evolution of our neighborhood council system.

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From 1992 to 1999, the system was discussed, argued, studied, argued again, and then enacted by the voters as part of the new City Charter. Let's call it the Conceptual Phase.

During the next two years it went through the Planning Phase. The new Department of Neighborhood Empowerment held scores of public meetings to involve everyone in developing the details of how the new system would work.

Early in 2006, the Building Phase will be finished. Because the original Neighborhood Councils began operations in 2002, and others are just getting started, the final (hopefully) Empowerment Phase has overlapped with the Building Phase. This has been especially difficult for Neighborhood Councils that have been trying to be fully functional inside a system that is still under construction.

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Major Reorganization

Before mid-year, our department will have undergone a major reorganization so that the maximum amount of its resources and attention can be poured into the Empowerment Phase: helping the Neighborhood Councils be the best that they can be.



NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL'S 2006-RESOLUTION #2

*Resolve: To stop whining
about the Brown Act.*

The Neighborhood Council system has attracted to it a number of bright and motivated people who want this grand experiment in grass-roots democracy to succeed.

In order to find out if there are enough of these people to take ownership of the system's future, the department will be looking for enough volunteers to form 13 Innovation Groups, and its members will work together to guide the completion of the Building Phase and capture the best

that the neighborhood council system has to offer in order to increase everyone's chances for success.

Special Commission

By mid-2006, the City Council and Mayor must create a special commission to review the Neighborhood Council system. Nobody is certain how the commission will be created, what it will do, or how it will get the job done. That will be defined by a city ordinance that has yet to be discussed or drafted.

What is clear is that in the time leading up to the birth of the commission, and during its work, the Neighborhood Councils and their system will undergo significant scrutiny.

See Page 11. "Are NCs Up to It?"

CITYWATCH

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

December 29, 2005
Volume 3 Issue 23

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CITYWATCH is published to encourage grassroots civic engagement through information, ideas and perspective.

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Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles

ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA

January 1, 2006

Dear Friends,

The New Year is a time to wish, and for this New Year, I wish for the City of Los Angeles to become a place that allows its kids to walk to school in safety and receive an education that gives them a genuine opportunity to pursue their dreams. I wish for the City of Los Angeles to become a place where it does not matter whether you are African American, Latino, Caucasian, Asian, Muslim, Jewish, Protestant or Catholic, or whether you live in Watts or Westwood, but rather every Angeleno is an equal stakeholder in the city's future. I wish for the City of Los Angeles to become the great global city of our century.

I may this time of year bring the utmost joy, and also may the New Year be the beginning of the City's most prosperous and best year ever.

Very truly yours,

ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA
Mayor

State ... 2006

State May Try This Crazy
Grassroots Democracy Stuff

(This from the LA Times (Dec 26, 2005) by Dan Morain.)

As Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's Year of Reform ends with a thud, here's a concept: Give regular folks a shot.

Under a new proposal, voters chosen at random would form a "citizens" assembly—no politicians allowed—to study California's political system and suggest improvements. Their ideas would pass muster, or not, with all voters at the ballot box.

The way California elects its lawmakers and other officials needs a face lift, says Assemblyman Joe Canciamilla, but "the system is not designed to change itself."

The Democrat from Pittsburg and Assemblyman Keith Richman (R-Northridge) plan to introduce the citizen idea when the Legislature convenes next month.

"However bad the public thinks (the system) is, it is worse," said Richman. "I know this sounds corny, but what we're trying to do is to restore representative democracy." ■

CITYWATCH
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HOLIDAYS
to the
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for all the earth's creatures

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Looking Forward ... 2006

The World Only Spins Forward

By Julie Butcher

For many, this is the time of year to reflect on the past year's challenges, accomplishments, shortcomings, to make plans for the New Year and to relax a little at holiday parties and with our families.

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But the SEIU Local 347 family doesn't have that luxury. Next year's going to be a tough one for city workers and building to fight the good fight continues. The struggle for respect for city workers and the work they do is the number one priority for the coming year.

City Workers Shine

Local 347 looks forward to advocating a municipal budget that supports the best government and services we can deliver. It is at the pothole, tree, and sidewalk level that city workers shine and we will continue to challenge the leaders of LA's Neighborhood Councils to win meaningful input into the budget process. Every penny of the peoples' money must be spent on those services best provided by public workers, in the most cost effective way possible.

For the past several years, members of Local 347 have trumpeted worker ideas that will save the City money, improve or expand service, or generate added revenue, some in new and novel ways. For instance, the imminent unification of seven different security services in LA – a vital step towards protecting the city and its assets – is the brainchild of workers who questioned the wisdom of multiple security agencies. They researched alternative models to best protect lives and property, and risked the wrath of all to show how silly what the City was doing was.

Protecting Workers

SEIU Local 347 has worked pointedly to protect the workers in the Department of Animal Services. The Union applauds Rocky Delgado and the LAPD for last week's announcement of criminal conspiracy charges filed against a small band of animal rights terrorists, a fanatical minority who believe animal rights are more important than human rights.

And, in these days of term limits and short-range efforts, it is inspiring to study the detail and vision in Councilmember Greig Smith's RENEW-LA plan. Smith

obviously began this effort on his first day in office, His leadership and ability to talk trash will positively impact the City of Los Angeles long beyond the 20 years his plan covers. His plan combines the best environmental and economic development thinking about what to do with the trash and, as LA's trash union, Local 347 looks forward to that future.

For the same reasons, Local 347 stands with those who insist on dealing with the drastic needs of a long-neglected infrastructure. That's why the Union continues to push Councilmember Wendy Greuel's simple but elegant "50-50" sidewalk program – now available in all 15 council districts. The sidewalk owner pays half and the City splits the cost and crumbling sidewalks are fixed.



NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL'S
2006-RESOLUTION #4
Resolve: To waste less time on procedure and invest more time on getting things done.

See Page 8. "The World Only Spins Forward"

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The City Council and Council Committees will not meet again this year.



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JACK WEISS

DISTRICT 5

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DISTRICT 13

**WISH THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS OF
LOS ANGELES AND ALL CITYWATCH
READERS GOOD HEALTH, GOOD CHEER AND
GOOD GOVERNMENT IN 2006!**



Taking the Measure of NCs

By Chris Weare

The USC Neighborhood Participation Project has been studying the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council movement since 1996. Our main goal for 2006 will be to summarize our findings and provide independent and objective factual background for the commission that will be named to review the NC system.

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We are working on a number of different fronts. We will be coming to NC board members with our second board member survey in late January. This survey will collect board member perspectives on the development of the system, on city government, and on community issues. Because a central goal of Neighborhood Councils is to provide more direct linkages between neighborhoods and city government, we are also collecting information on the political networks, created through Neighborhood Councils, that connect stakeholders, Neighborhood Councils and city officials.

To get richer insights on the accomplishments and challenges faced by Neighborhood Councils, we will conduct a number of NC activist focus groups on such topics as the NC's relationship with their City Council representative. We are also interviewing City Council staffers and departmental officials to get the city's perspective on Neighborhood Councils.

Finally, we intend to conduct a broader stakeholder survey to gauge the perception of Neighborhood Councils by the general population. In a 2003 survey 32.7% of residents said they knew of their Neighborhood Council and 88.6% thought they were a good idea. We want to see whether three years of additional work has increased their recognition and maintained their high level of support.

For samples of previous NPP reports: www.usc.edu/sppd/npp. For questions or comments on NPP's work: Juliet Musso or Chris Weare at musso@usc.edu or weare@usc.edu. (Chris Weare is Research Associate Professor at USC's School of Policy, Planning and Development.)



NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL'S 2006-RESOLUTION #1

Resolve: To revisit ... lest we forget, or never clearly understood ... the purpose of Neighborhood Councils (City Charter, Article IX— "Establishment of NCs").

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VOLUNTEER
with hopes & ideals
(but little money)
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*We salute the efforts of every
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volunteer, and city employee
who is contributing
to this bold grassroots movement.*

And we invite you to focus upon the
empowerment possibilities
presented by Clean Money!

We hope you'll share your good ideas!

**Who knows?
You may be that great leader!**



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CityWatch 2006 Assignments

◆ The Missing South LA NC Voices

Has the Empowerment Congress ... once leaders in the NC movement ... lost its way without Ridley-Thomas?

◆ For NCs, the Mayor Has Promises to Keep

How good is the Mayor's word?

◆ An NC Review Commission: So, How Bad Can It Be?

The best and worst case scenarios.

◆ Is This the Best LA City Council Ever?

Our panel and our readers have opinions

◆ NC Boundaries the Same as Council Districts?

Will NCs then report to their Councilpersons?

◆ LA's 90,000 Homeless

Does anyone, other than Jan Perry, care?

◆ Who Will Recognize the LA NC Congress?

It's one thing to declare the LANCC official.

It's another to be recognized and credible

◆ Land Use 101 in Plain English

Easy to understand series. A guide for NCs

◆ Endless, Irritating, Patronizing Presentations: Is This What We Expect of City Council?

Isn't there a better to pay respect and give recognition ... and get on with the City's Biz?

◆ NCs Got Aced in the City's Street Furniture Plan-Too Late to Recover?

Some NCs want to fight. Some don't care ... which is why there were left out in the first place.

◆ Leave New Ethics Laws to the Ethical

Should elected officials who've been fined for ethics violations recuse themselves from participation in new ethics legislation? See the view points ... and the list.

◆ Volunteerism vs. Commitment

◆ NCs and Crime

**Next CityWatch: January 9 ...
...ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU!**



Happy Holidays

and

Seasons Greetings

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Holiday Memo**To: Neighborhood Councils****From: Ron Deaton****Re: 2006**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all of you who have worked on implementing our LADWP/NC MOU.

As you know, the primary purposes of the MOU were to **improve communications** with the NCs on significant City-wide matters as well as on local neighborhood issues relative to LADWP.



In striving to do so, we hope that our email notifications and our web page (www.ladwp.com/nc) have been useful to you.



The LADWP **staff has enjoyed** meeting with many of you this year. The Congress of Neighborhoods, community events and NC meetings, the Owens Valley Tours and the Solar and Budget Workshops were opportunities to learn from and get to know each other.

We **look forward to meeting with many more** of you in the coming new year as we address our new Renewable Energy goal (20% by 2010), rising natural gas costs, the third party evaluation of our revenue requirements, solar power and rates.

Also, looking forward, we anticipate having **three more NC liaisons** to serve you in the very near future and hope to see you in your communities and at our upcoming workshops.

On behalf of LADWP and the City of Los Angeles, I would like to wish you, your families, and local communities you serve, seasons greetings and a **happy and successful 2006**.

Ronald F. Deaton, General Manager
LADWP

Make Contact!**To Reach CityWatch***Email*Editor@CityWatchLA.com*Download/Read*www.lancissues.orglacityneighborhoods.comCityWatchLA.com*Call***323.937.0504**

*'Tis the season
to be jolly
Fa Law Law
Law Law Law Law*

Season's Greetings**ROBERTA AVRUTIN LAW OFFICES****323.653.3900****8383 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 510 Beverly Hills****The World Spins Forward-From Page 4**

At the urging of Councilmember Bernard Parks, the City's looking at the next step: The City will fix your sidewalk now and you can defer paying for it until you sell your house. The Bureau of Street Services guarantees its work and seeks to replace those sidewalk-destroying trees with beautiful but appropriate species that can coexist with wheelchairs and strollers well into the future.

The "point-of-sale" sidewalk plan would also create approximately 1100 new jobs in LA in its first year: good jobs, jobs that come with family benefits and wages that can sustain LA families. That's an essential part of a positive LA future.

Education is Important

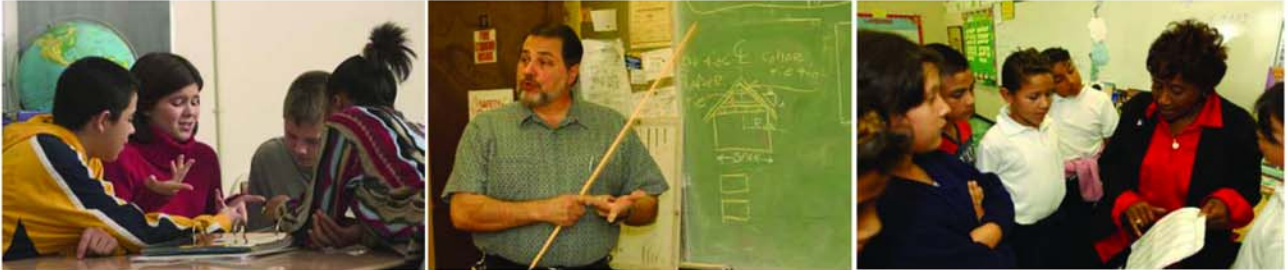
So is education. It's an issue of importance for workers, as they are forced to decide where they live based on foraging for the best schools, public or private. The children of LA's workers deserve the best we can muster and we're going to have to muster in new and creative ways.

Where are tomorrow's welders going to come from? Is anyone thinking about critical vocational training? Are any of the City's educational institutions training mechanics to work on clean fuel vehicles as the City leads in this important environmental milieu? Does the City of Los Angeles have a plan for recruiting, grooming, training, and advancing tomorrow's workers to replace the thousands set to retire in the coming few years?

Whew! It's no wonder there's been little time to relax (or shop for the holidays)! It's OK. There's tons of work to do, work that won't wait until after the Epiphany! And the world only spins forward...

(Julie Butcher is the General Manager of Service Employees International Union Local 347.) ■

STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS GROW FROM STRONG SCHOOLS.



We would like to pay tribute to the grass roots work of the boards and stakeholders of the 87 Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils!

We see the Neighborhood Councils as partners in communication with the citizens of each community. Please feel free to invite us to participate in support of your community events, education and outreach programs.

At United Teachers Los Angeles, we believe in the union difference-- better lives for working families contribute to the safety and economies of strong communities.

Our new leadership is committed to making UTLA a vibrant, cutting-edge, community partner with the Neighborhood Councils.

We Invite the Neighborhood Councils to Share our Vision for Los Angeles Schools!

1. Cap and reduce class size.
2. Raise salaries and maintain and improve health care benefits for all school employees.
3. Make educators the driving force behind curriculum programs and pacing plans.
4. Cut the LAUSD bureaucracy and adequately fund the classroom and school site.
5. Vigorously defend teachers, students, and public education from attack.
6. Provide the necessary resources to ensure safe schools.
7. Build enduring labor/community relationships and coalitions to defend public education.
8. Hold politicians accountable.
9. Build partnerships with LAUSD from a position of strength.
10. Organize and mobilize for a stronger UTLA.

A.J. Duffy, President
Lois Bradford, UTLA/NEA VP / UTLA/NEA Affiliate President
Julie Washington, Elementary Vice President
Linda Guthrie, Secondary Vice President
Ana Valencia, Secretary
David Goldberg, Treasurer



Perspective-From Page 1.

The new chairmanship of the Education and Neighborhoods Committee ... who has his own, somewhat different than the Charter, vision for NCs ... offers yet another new frontier for taming. As does the mostly new Board of Neighborhood Commissioners ... who also, it would seem, see their mission as one of reform. It appears that most of the Mayor's appointments, to positions relating to Neighborhood Councils, came with a "fix it" mandate without requiring a test drive first.

2006

Issues List

Clean Money
LAUSD Takeover
Downtown Rehab
Transportation
Homelessness
Affordable Housing
Ethics Reform
LAX Expansion
Trash Fees
Landfills
Traffic
DWP Rate Increase
Street Furniture
Union Contracts
Animal Services

If all of the above weren't challenge enough, NCs will face a new Planning Director and will need to be prepared to make themselves heard on the DWP rate increase, election reform, ethics reform, education, affordable housing, homelessness, union contracts, animal services and transportation. That's a partial list.

NCs Must Look at Themselves

Neighborhood Councils will have to look at themselves as well, this year. At the challenges, vulnerabilities and risks that lie within. This month marks the four year anniversary of the first NC certification. Council boards today offer predominantly new faces. And attitudes. Most lack historical memory, have limited knowledge of what inspired the birth of Councils or understand much of the intent of the Charter mandate. One mid-city board is considering eight amendments to bylaws that were once created by their entire board and have served them since before certification. A newly certified board, in the same area, considered rewriting their entire bylaws before the first meeting of the new board.

At risk in this morphing process is the concept that NCs were born to hold elected officials accountable, to monitor city services and to change the way the government does business. Not to mention the independence, diversity and Inclusionary components of this grassroots "rebellion."

Giving up Independence

More and more, NCs seem willing to give up their independence in the name of organization, simplification and process. There are citywide systems now for how NCs run their elections, spend their money, handle grievances, communicate with the Mayor on the budget, influence the priority of issues on the City Council agenda, weigh in on the street furniture plans that allow advertising blight to invade community sidewalks. And now, Councilmembers Zine and Smith are considering the idea that NC boundaries match those of the City Council districts.

The need for NCs to conduct their own assessment of their own Councils is now. Does the Council reflect the community? Does the work of the Council reflect the needs of the community, the spirit of the Charter, the promises made at certification?

Are Members Committed

Are the members committed to protecting the neighborhood's right to empowerment, the independence the Charter promised and to have a voice in the City's business? Which, of course, is the stakeholder's business.

Have the members grasped the concept that empowerment is not given. It is taken? It is a birthright in a democracy. That includes grassroots democracy.

See next column



From previous column

Consider this: The Mayor appoints the BONC commissioners who create policy for and certify Neighborhood Councils. The Evaluation Commission is appointed by the Mayor and the City Council ... all of whom the Charter created Neighborhood Councils to monitor and hold accountable. The charge is up hill. But then, the NC organizers knew that at the outset. The Charter doesn't provide a guarantee. It provides an opportunity. For neighborhoods that are willing to engage the process, energize their empowerment and assume the responsibility for their inherent right to a voice in their own government.

Always NCs

There will always be Neighborhood Councils. If the Charter were revised and the DONE and the BONC were to disappear tomorrow, 25-35 NCs would come together in a heartbeat and form an empowerment coalition that would continue the effort to hold elected officials accountable and to provide a voice for LA's neighborhoods. 2006 is about the preservation of the Neighborhood Council system. About whether NCs grasp the empowerment concept and know how to use it. If there were no NC system, a number of Neighborhood Councils would be out of business. So, it's also about understanding that as the system goes, so go individual councils. The question is: is your Council prepared to become engaged in these citywide issues and help protect the system?

How Will NCs Handle It?

NCs have a full agenda in 2006. How they handle it can affect the future of Neighborhood Councils. Too many failures will permanently alter the perception of Neighborhood Councils and their ability to influence. The new year is full of challenge ... and, as we keep pointing out, considerable risk. The question remains: are they up to it? ■

Are NCs Up to It?-From Page 2

Those who want the Neighborhood Council system to fail will find the bad and magnify it. They will take an invalid stereotype, such as "all they do is fight between themselves in futile battles over power," and portray that as the way of all Neighborhood Councils. They will take titillating urban myths, such as "dogs vote," and use them to get people to believe that Neighborhood Council folk are goofballs who are irrelevant to our lives.

Those who believe that the system is either a great idea or wild-eyed idealism worth trying, will find the good, praise it, and build upon it. They will likely urge the review commission to focus less on what would amount to a performance evaluation of the Neighborhood Councils, and more on discussing diagnostic improvements to the system.

Personal Concern

My biggest personal concern is that the commissioners and those who provide input to the commission will not take the time to understand the basic principles upon which the system was built.

Nearly all of the reports and studies that were produced during the Conceptual Phase can be found on the department's website at www.LACityNeighborhoods.com in the Reference Library, but I worry about who will take the time to understand the philosophy. Without this understanding, recommendations will likely be based upon political expediency and a failure to understand that effective grass-roots democracy, by its nature, cannot be totally uniform, orderly, and non-threatening to elected officials.

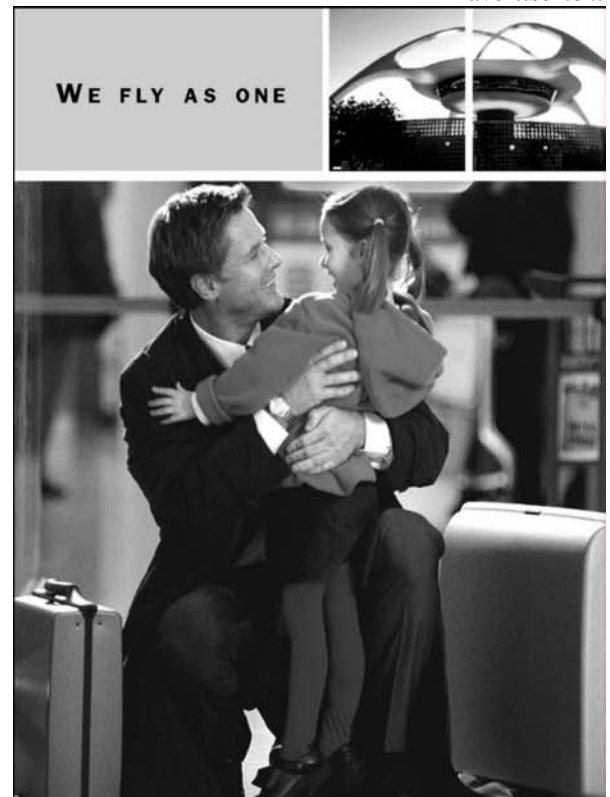
NC Opportunity

Finally, the new year will provide Neighborhood Councils an opportunity to fulfill the expectation of the City Charter that they will speak from time-to-time with one voice. When that happens, the Neighborhood Councils will realize that they have the ability to exercise more influence over the governmental decision-making process than the most powerful lobbyists.

Politicians measure influence and power by ones ability to produce votes. Neighborhood Councils have the resources and skills to do that on a frighteningly large scale. The final missing ingredient is the desire to do so.

Happy New Year!

(Greg Nelson is the General Manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and one of the architects of the LA's Neighborhood Council system.) ■



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TAKE OFF.**

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**Los Angeles World Airports.
We Fly as One with the Community.**



Happy Holidays Councilmembers...

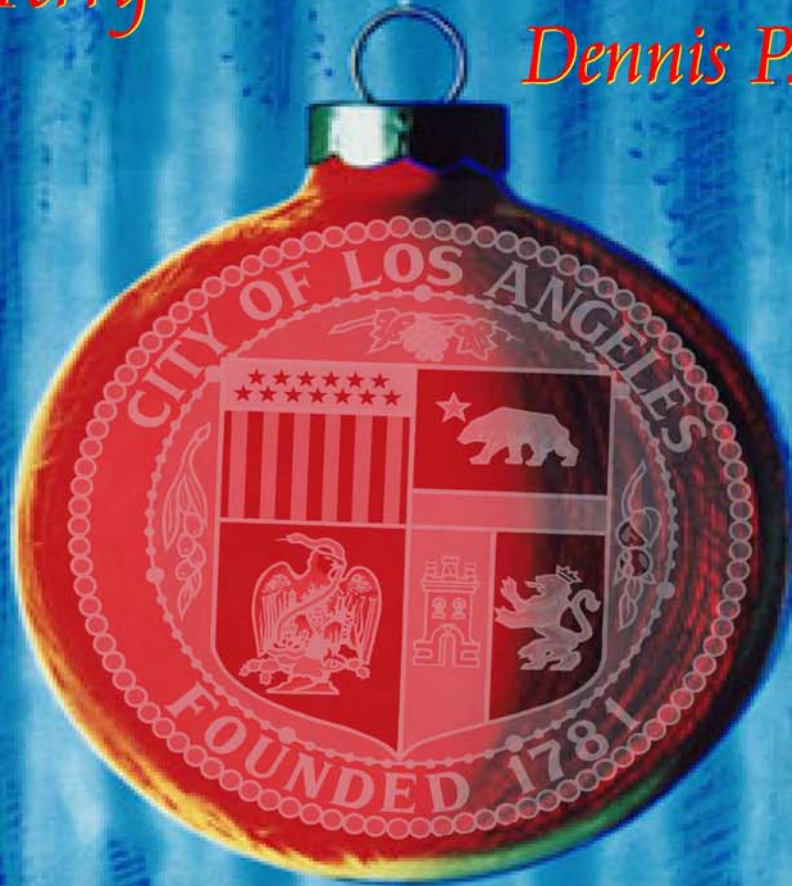
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