



an insider look at city hall

CITYWATCH

citywide edition

**February 6, 2006
Volume 4 Issue 5**

CityWatch Today—No matter where you come down on the new LA NC Congress, one cannot deny that the inaugural event on Saturday last was significant.

A coalition of 33 Neighborhood Councils, to date, agree to come together to find ways to deal with citywide issues, to share their experiences and ideas and to make their presence felt. By any historical NC standard, that's worth noting.

So, this CityWatch is very much about that first official meeting of the newly formed NC Congress.

We also offer more insight into the breakup of the Mid-Town North Hollywood Council and a reminder of the upcoming BONC meetings, dealing, in both cases, with decertification issues.

We hope you find it useful.

--Editor

Say What?

"I see this Congress leading initiatives that go go on the ballot.

I see this Congress Becoming educated and hiring your own pollsters and political consultants."

**--Janice Hahn
LA City Councilmember
At 1st official
Meeting of the NC Congress**



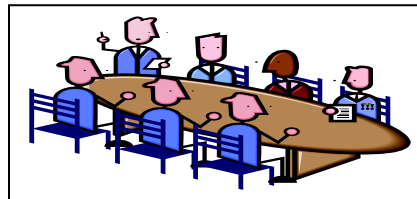
Perspective

NC Congress Launch a Go

Janice Hahn: "You are empowered!"

By Ken Draper

The opening day drama, of the new NC Congress, came in three acts: a celebration, a somewhat raucous search for an interim leader and a productive, taking-care-of-business closer.



This was the first official meeting of the newly formed LA Neighborhood Council Congress. LANCC is a coalition of councils that have ratified a Charter that provides a stage for networking and for dealing with citywide issues. Thirty-three Neighborhood Councils have signed on

to date. Another dozen have reportedly agendaized a ratification vote.

The opening act featured an hour of political celebrity, assurances that what the gathering was embarking on was indeed historical and awesome and a standing ovation or two.

Councilwoman and keynote speaker Janice Hahn called it an "historic day."

"You don't need me anymore. You don't need City Council members anymore. You are empowered," Hahn told an appreciative crowd of over a hundred participants.



Former BONC Commissioner and meeting facilitator Pat Herrera Duran opened the event with, "This isn't just another meeting. Some day," she said, "the Congress is going to meet and they won't remember this day. But we will. It will be in the history of Neighborhood Councils."

**1st Meeting
LA NC Congress
By the #'s**

- Attendance—100-Plus
- NC Reps & Alternates—33
- Ratified NCs—25 of 33
- Event Running time—4 hrs
40 mins

Councilmember Wendy Greuel welcomed the NC representatives. "You have demonstrated that people in this City have a voice (and) we as City Council are here to listen to you. To stand side-by-side with you. Not in front or in back, but side-by-side with you."

Councilman Dennis Zine spoke and called the event, "Democracy at its best."

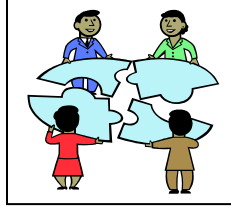
Hahn's keynote produced a couple of standing ovations. One, the result of this confidence-builder: "You have taken the next logical step. This (the NC Congress) is the natural progression. This is growing up on the part of Neighborhood Councils ... your voice will echo long into the future about issues we care about."

See Page 7. "Perspective"

GuestWords**From Inside the Mid-Town Breakup:
The President's Perspective**

By Cary Adams

Thank you for the article concerning the boundary change for the Mid-Town North Hollywood Neighborhood Council. However, there is more to the story that might have greater implications for BONC than your article provides. As with any neighborhood council, members of the MTNHNC had various personality and philosophical issues. The "split" was precipitated by events surrounding a number of irregularities related to last summer's officers' election.

**Back Story**

The Mid-Town North Hollywood NC has voted to reduce its boundaries to roughly one-third of the Council's current size. They suggest, in return, that the remaining area be divided and that two separate and different NCs be formed and certified. Each of the three smaller councils would then be entitled to equal funding, rights and services. (See CityWatch-1-30-06 at www.CityWatchLA.com) Since the vote, some stakeholders and board members have taken issue with the motivation for the action and the legitimacy of the vote. Current President, Cary Adams, offers his take.)

As a result of those events, in early January, several changes were proposed of the By-laws for consideration at the January Meeting. The most important was a boundary modification that placed outside the MTNHNC 24,000 stakeholders, one and one-half districts with seven member seats.

During subsequent discussion at the Rules and Elections Committee Meeting, various other streets were suggested as boundaries. This would allow inclusion of some of those living in an adjacent, under represented area. All the suggested boundaries were vehemently rejected by those proposing the boundary changes. The original draft was insistently placed on the Agenda and provided according to the requirements of the Brown Act.

See Page 6. "GuestWords"

REACTION**Debate, Questioning at First LA NC
Congress Called Democracy at Its Best**

By Brady Westwater

The spirited debate and questioning of every action at the first official LA NC Congress was Democracy at its best.



Those of involved in this process made a conscious decision to create a Charter that was as loose as possible so that the by-laws, most of the officers and structure of the Congress would be decided by the officially legally elected representatives of each NC as opposed to the formation taskforce.

The Taskforce also made a conscious decision not to have any of its members convene, or run the meeting, until the official body as a whole decided who should be the temporary chair.

See Page 6. "Reaction"

CITYWATCH
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Correction

The "No Hollywood NC Votes to Split Up" (1-30-06) misspelled Gary Baratta's name. Correct spelling is **BARATTA**. The error was unintentional.

More: LANCC Congress

“This is a Truly Historic Day”

By Councilwoman Janice Hahn

This is really an historic day

■■■

We (on the Charter Commission) heard the seeds of secession before anyone else. One of the things we knew we could not ignore was the idea that people wanted to weigh in on the government that decided their fate.



If you truly are to be empower-red. If you truly are to change the future of your neighborhood and city, you must transcend your own City Council members. You must be separate form the politics of City Hall.

■■■

Who can remember the burglar alarm issue? That was fun to watch. Here was the Police Commission completely changing the way the police dept responded to your call. No warnings no notification. No advance notice to

Excerpts from Councilwoman Janice Hahn’s keynote speech at the inaugural meeting of the newly formed LA NC Congress—

Neighborhood Councils. I showed them (City Council members) the part of the Charter that says Neighborhood Councils have to be notified with enough time to weigh in. I said, let’s wait for Neighborhood Councils. I have never seen City Council packed with that many Neighborhood Council members on any other issue. And, as a result of the Neighborhood Council’s aroused and unified voice, we now have a new policy in LA.

■■■

Who remembers the DWP rate hike that didn’t happen? Because Neighborhood Councils, with a very loud and clear voice, said “you have not made the case.” Plus, we then put in the third party audit that is required now before any DWP rate hike and that audit will have to be presented to Neighborhood Councils before (any future rate action is taken).

■■■

I’ve been called the mother of Neighborhood Councils. I don’t mind. Just don’t call me grandmother in public. I feel a little bit like a mother today ...I feel a little bit like I did when my daughter, Katy, was three years old and it was time to put her in preschool. That first day of preschool, the yellow school bus pulled up in front of the

See next column

Inaugural LA NC CONGRESS Souvenir Program FREE



If you were unable to attend the February 4 inaugural meeting of the new LA NC Congress, or were unable to get a copy of what turned out to be a hot souvenir item, CityWatch will send you one free.

*The attractive **Souvenir Program Packet** includes the Program/Agenda; NC Congress History; Charter Congress members; Signatories to the first City Council NC motion; LANCC Timelines and more.*

Just go to the CityWatch website and enter your name and address.

www.CityWatchLA.com

From previous column

house ... and Katy grabbed her back pack and was out the front door. I said, “Katy, I’m driving you to school this morning.” She got on those bus steps and turned around and said, “Bye Mom.” I could not believe it. I was horrified. But I was also thrilled ...that she was so confident and ...empowered ... to go on her own.

I’m feeling like that this morning. By forming this congress you really have demonstrated that you really no longer need my help. You no longer need the City Council’s help. You have become self sufficient. And, the idea for this Congress came from you. It didn’t come from the City Council. Not from the Mayor or the Department. It came from you.

See Page 4. “Hahn Speech”

NC Watch**February Theme for the BONC: Decertification**

By Sara Epstein

Decertification appears to be the special plate on the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners menu this month. That is one of the options offered in the DONE Staff Report on complaints against the Vermont Harbor NC set to be heard tonight at John Muir Middle School. Decertification has already been recommended for Old Northridge NC, scheduled for the February 21 BONC meeting.

In the case of Vermont Harbor, DONE has told board members that “serious concerns have been raised” about the boards interaction with stakeholders.

Community Deserves Fresh Start

In a letter to VHNC, DONE said that “the community deserves a fresh start” and wants a new board election. They offer to options to the Neighborhood Council: Decertification or voluntary resignation of all remaining board members and an immediate election.

Also on tonight's BONC agenda: Staff report on Park Mesa Heights' election and the 912 Commission that will review the LA NC system.

(Tonight's BONC meeting: 7 p.m. at John Muir Middle School, 5929 S Vermont Ave. More info: www.lacityneighborhoods.com) ▣

Hahn LANCC Speech- From Page 3

You have taken the next logical step. This is the natural progression. This is growing up on the part of Neighborhood Councils. I think that what you're doing is exactly what I had hoped for. We (the Charter Commission) wanted you to decide your own destiny.

■ ■ ■

I feel like now you will be leading this City into a future that I think very few people imagined. Some people were afraid of it. Some are still afraid of it.

You have set up a system here where your voice will echo long into the future about issues that we care about. How we deal with affordable housing. How we deal with gang violence. How we deal with pollution. You will tell Los Angeles how we're going to solve traffic problems. How to fix sidewalks. Will that be something that this Congress decides should be a neighborhood public safety bond improvement?

I see this Congress as leading initiatives that go on the ballot. I see this Congress becoming educated. Hiring your own pollsters and political consultants telling you what's right and what's wrong and how you might shape the future of Los Angeles.

See next column**CITYWATCH
DayPlanner****City Council**

February 7, 8, 10 (10 a.m.)
City Hall (Council Chamber)

Education & Neighborhoods

February 14 (9 a.m.)
City Hall

BONC

February 7 (6:30 p.m.)
John Muir Middle School
5929 S Vermont Ave

- Vermont Harbor NC report—possible Board action
- Discussion of 912 Commission

NC/Planning MOU

February 11 (10 a.m.)
LADWP Building
Hope & First Streets

Valley Alliance

February 9 (6:30 p.m.)
4929 Van Nuys Blvd

- SFV Coalition on Gangs
- Proposed 912 Commission

Board of Fire Commissioners

February 7 (3 p.m.)
City Hall East (Rm 1820)

- Addressing Laura Chick Audit

Board of Water & Power

February 7 (1:30 p.m.)
LADWP Bldg (Rm 1555-H)
Hope & First Streets

- Addressing the transfer of \$185-million to City's General Fund

PLUM

February 9 (8:30 a.m.)
City Hall (Rm 1010)

**From previous column**

I think your challenge will be how you now weigh in on citywide issues. How will you get your own individual member Neighborhood Council to agendize something in a timely manner.

■ ■ ■

I think you will be a force that will be ... I don't want to say will be hard to recon with, because it's a voice that we want to recon with ... it's a voice that will carry this City into the future.

See Page 5. "Hahn Speech"

We've Got Mail



Just Say No to \$185-Million DWP Transfer

The DWP Commissioners are scheduled to rubber stamp the annual transfer of \$185-million to the City's General Fund.

Hey, why not use this money to fund the \$2-billion (yes, billion) of undisclosed and unfunded retirement obligations?

Or do you want a separate rate hike just to foot the bill for these massive obligations?

Say NO to DWP on Tuesday, February 7th at 1:30 pm in Room 1555-H of The John Ferraro Building located at 111 North Hope Street in downtown Los Angeles.

--Name withheld on request

•••

Tells CityWatch to Stick to Facts...His Facts

Where have you been? (CityWatch 1-30-06-Opinion: Ms Chick: Supportive but Curious) Chick wanted to do an audit for Delgadillo from the beginning, but when she attempted to, Delgadillo told her that the Charter does not allow the Controller to audit other City elected official. This is when the State stepped in to perform the audit. If you are going to profess to give news—get the facts right.

--jsmmsj@earthlink.net

Editor's response: Not having Charter approval didn't stop the Controller from holding a press conference and asking to audit the LAUSD.

▶◀

Hahn LANCC Speech-From Page 4.

I have never looked back since the Charter reform days. No one knew what Neighborhood Councils would be. No one knew the effect they would have. But I will tell what ... there are books being written about us. There are professors teaching classes about us. There are studies being undertaken about us. Because out there no one dared to believe that the second largest city in the country would ever be organized neighborhood by neighborhood and that we would have a viable process where Neighborhood Councils directed policy at the government level. And that is what you have done.

•••

I couldn't be more proud today. I want us to be a world class city. But I want us to have world class neighborhoods. I think that you in this Congress will have the voice to not only demand world class neighborhoods but you will make us into a city that no one envisioned to this point.

•••

You don't need me anymore. You don't need your City Council members anymore. You are empowered. I'm

LANCC Reaction Continues ...

"Sounds like the LANC Congress is democracy in action, just as it should be. I wish I could have been there."

--DeDe Audet
GRVNC

"The Congress, like the individual councils, is historic largely because it is self-defining. There was no guidebook. There were no rules set in stone. The fact that it took less than three hours to elect a leader of the fledgling group, which had no pre-defined officer positions, terms or election procedures, should be considered a remarkable act of democratic efficiency."

--Dan Pasley
CSPNC

"There are many unanswered questions. We're really scared of it."

--Norma Foster
HUNC

"What a day!!

The LANC Congress had its first meeting and got off to a VERY AUSPICIOUS START."

--Dr. Daniel Wiseman

"The formation of the Congress has drawn opposition from some residents and business owners who fear it will dilute the hard-won power of the individual neighborhood groups."

---LA Times

"Yesterday's first meeting of the newly formed LANC congress managed to do what it needed to do, which was to bring itself into existence and to start the process of self definition."

--Bob Gelfand, CSPNC

"A voice from the back of the room at the NC Congress. How exciting. What a confidence builder for NCs. This truly takes it to the next level."

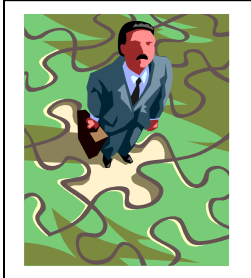
--Stephanie Hargrove, West LA

◆◆◆

proud to watch you. I'm proud to see you getting on that bus today. Without me. And, I can't wait for you to come home at the end of the day to hear about all of your activities. ■

GuestWords-Inside the Mid-Town Breakup

At the January Meeting, the draft that was so vigorously defended by its sponsors was interestingly not presented. Instead, a boundary change was presented that placed outside the MTNHNC 50,000 stakeholders, three and one-half districts with 11 members' seats eliminated. The additional 26,000 stakeholders came from the under represented area that had only four seats, three of which are occupied by retirees.



Although board members had the draft agenda, most of the Board, but especially the four additional members whose seats were included for elimination, had no advance knowledge of the amendment that was presented. Most of the seven members affected by the agendized plan had input and advance knowledge their seats would be eliminated but the four who were added had no such input or knowledge their seats would be eliminated. Therein lies the problem of outreach. If four board members had no knowledge of the plan to eliminate their seats by their fellow board members, how could their 26,000 stakeholders have knowledge of the plan? And what of the original 24,000 stakeholders in the agendized plan? Did they figure into that decision? Is this neighborhood empowerment?

Certification Lengthy Process

As all know, there is a lengthy certification process for neighborhood councils. Signatures must be gathered, commitment need be made and by-laws established. Extensive election procedures require two outreach mailings to each address and at least two informational meetings for candidates. The common denominator is outreach and inclusion. Isn't it odd, with no stakeholder input, no advance notice and no outreach, 2/3 (15 board members) can eliminate 50,000 stakeholders, three and one-half districts and 11 board member seats (four of which were completely in the dark)?

How can we empower neighborhoods when stakeholders are removed from a neighborhood council in such a cavalier manner with no due process? Therein lies the problem of outreach. If four board members had no knowledge of the plan to eliminate their seats by their fellow board members, how could their 26,000 stakeholders have knowledge? The real "empowerment" was one neighborhood empowering itself over another neighborhood for self interest. *(Cary Adams is the President of the Mid-Town North Hollywood Neighborhood Council.)* ■

Reaction-From Page 2

Additionally, the organizing group felt, and the official group on Saturday agreed, that the temporary Chair would have no stated term but that he/she would only serve at the pleasure of the Senate until more councils had joined the Congress.

Now does that sound like a recipe for semi-organized chaos?

Hell – yes!

And it was. Every member of the Congress Senate – and many members of the large audience – joined in on the debate of every detail on how the meeting should be run and how decisions should be arrived at – even before any decisions were made. But once the temporary Chair was elected – by one vote – everyone came together and unanimously agreed upon temporary committee chairs and then set out to work together knowing that everything decided at Saturday's meeting was the result of what the NC representatives

Preventive Law

Who Gets the House? Are you sure?

Thinking about adding a loved one as joint tenant on the title to your house? Many people think this is a good way to avoid probate.

Avoid a Court Action

But here are some things to consider. First, if a creditor ever gets a court judgment against the other joint tenant, the creditor can start a legal process that can end with you, the 'good' joint tenant, co-owning 'your' house with a stranger.

Face the Tax Issue

Second, if you expect the property to appreciate significantly between the time you add your friend or child's name to title and the time you die, your friend or child might face capital gains taxes that she would avoid if you instead gave her the property in your will or trust.

There might be other factors to consider, as well, depending on your situation.

Practice Preventive Law--

Talk to your lawyer to decide whether joint tenancy is best for you.

ROBERTA AVRUTIN

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chose to make happen in free and very open debate *(Brady Westwater is a writer and sometime contributor to CityWatch)* ■

Perspective-NC Congress Launch a Go

And, following this in her closing: "I have never looked back since the Charter reform. No one knew what Neighborhood Councils would be, but I will tell you this ... there are books being written about us. There are professors teaching classes about us. There are studies being undertaken about us. Because out there no one dared believe that the second largest city in the country would ever be organized neighborhood by neighborhood ... a viable process where Neighborhood Councils directed policy at the government level. And, that is what you have done here."



Kicking off the orientation segment, DONE General Manager Greg Nelson revisited the embryonic discussions of the Neighborhood Council concept, of which he as a central part. Nelson worked for then LA Councilman Joel Wachs when Wachs became a believer in the idea and made it a major part of his Mayoral campaign in 1992. In his announcement, Wachs talked about LA becoming a "family of cities."

Nelson told the gathering, "We're at the next stage in our evolution."

As part of the orientation, Jeff Jacobberger, who chaired the Charter Drafting Committee, recounted the process and the timelines that led to Saturday historic event. Jacobberger is an attorney and the Secretary of the Mid City WEST Community Council.

Act II

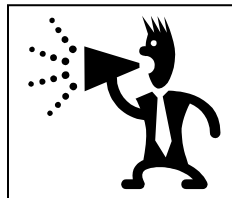
Act II provided the dramatic tension. A lengthy ... and oft times rocky ... pursuit of the groups first Chair of the Congress' Senate.

As Jacobberger explained, the Charter purposely left many of the Congress' organizational details for the Neighborhood Council representatives to resolve. Including the structure of the leadership. As a result, working in effect without a map, it took NC reps an hour and a half to elect Tarzana NC's President and former County Prosecutor, Len Shaffer, their first Chair. He was elected by a margin of one and discussion continues on whether the position is interim.

During the process, representatives disagreed on whether one or more officers should be elected, by ballot or by raised hand, length of the term and the application of Roberts Rules.

Members of the 50-plus public in attendance joined the fray, demanding more public comment participation in the debate. Some shouting for attention.

"Typical of grassroots democracy," noted one observer, "but, as usual, they got it together and made a decision out of what looks a like chaos. It ain't always fancy, but it's fun to watch."



As the LA Times reported, the "Congress has drawn opposition from some residents and business owners who fear it will dilute the hard-won power of individual neighborhood groups." Even though the formation process has took more than a year, there are still those who feel the "process has been too hasty."

Hollywood United's, Norma Foster, told the Times, "We're really scared of it."

One public speaker, Donna Schwalm from Van Nuys, went so far as to predict that the NC Congress would be the end of Neighborhood Councils.

See Page 8. "Perspective"



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CITYWATCH



**First
Thing
Monday
Mornings**

Perspective-From Page 7



After Shaffer took over, the group's closing Act was smoother and productive. They approved Shaffer's choices of ad hoc committee chairs: 1) Jeff Jacobberger (Structure & Selection of Officers); 2) Brady Westwater and

Roger Kulpa (Planning for LANCC Participation in the June 17 DONE Congress); 3) Ken Draper (Communications/Outreach); David Strouse (Funding).

The LANCC Senate will meet next on March 4. One NC delegate wrapped it up. "We've survived the rehearsal. Now it's time to get the show to Broadway."

The Work Ahead

No one denies the work ahead for LA's Neighborhood Council Congress. Organizing itself. Continued outreach to Councils yet to climb on board. Sensitivity to the diversity issue. Creating a communications center, which is the backbone of the Congress. And, no one can guarantee that it will achieve its lofty goals. Or, that it truly will become, to paraphrase Janice Hahn, a force to be reckoned with.

But few would also deny that, in the relatively young history of LA's Neighborhood Councils, what happened on February 4 was significant. Hahn said, "You are empowered." The formation of the Congress would appear to support that. What remains now is for Neighborhood Councils to prove that they know how to use that empowerment to serve the thousands of stakeholders they claim to represent. *(See excerpts from Janice Hahn keynote address, quotes from other speakers, reaction to first NC Congress, photos ... all in this CityWatch) ▣*

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**Next CityWatch:
 February 13 ...
 ...ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU!**

Quotables

(From or about the LA NC Congress)

"You have demonstrated that the people of this city have a voice. We, at City Council are here to listen to you. To stand side-by-side with you. Not in front or in back, but side-by-side with you."

--LA Councilmember Wendy Greuel

...

"We're at the next stage in our evolution and it's exciting beyond my ability to explain."

--Greg Nelson, GM-DONE

...

"This is democracy at its best."

--LA Councilman Dennis Zine

...

"Leaders from each of the Neighborhood Councils will convene at least quarterly as a citywide Neighborhood Congress to discuss citywide matters such as City Charter amendments, ordinances, initiatives, programs, multi-cultural dialogue and the general overall course of the city."

--Former LA Councilman Joel Wachs' 1996 motion to establish NCs

...

"This isn't just another meeting. Some day the Congress is going to meet and they won't remember this day. But we will It will be written in the history of Neighborhood Councils."

**--Pat Herrera Duran
 Former BONC Commissioner**