



an insider look at city hall

CITYWATCH

citywide edition

March 27, 2006
Volume 4 Issue 12

CityWatch Today-Neighborhood Councils continue to trip over their elections. Neighborhood Councils have been holding ... and DONE has been overseeing ... the public election of NC boards for more than four years. It is our view that, by now, stakeholders should be able to trust that the two parties have it figured out. As we ask in today's lead: "How tough can this be?"

There are, it seems, as many visions of what the LA NC Congress should look like as there are Neighborhood Councils. Former Charter Reform Commissioner, Jerry Gaines, provides his vision on Page 2.

And, of course, we provide a number of different angles on the retirement of DONE GM ... and Empowerment Guru ... Greg Nelson.



Thank you for stopping by.

--Editor

Say What?

"We've talked more trash in the last six to eight months than we probably wanted to."

--Wendy Greuel
LA Councilwoman

At City Council this month during the debate on the Sunshine Canyon contract renewal



NC Watch

Election Glitches Get One NC Upset and Another Decertified

By David Lowell

As one observer wondered at a recent Citywide Alliance meeting, "How tough can this be?" He was talking about the on-going parade of delayed, canceled or messed up Neighborhood Council elections and how, after four years to get it right, neither DONE or the NCs seem to have figured it out. The most recent councils to join the election snafu parade: Westchester Playa del Rey and Old Northridge. In the case of Old Northridge, it got them decertified. A first for LA's NC system.

...

As for Westchester Playa del Rey, the cause of their dilemma is a bit fuzzy but this much seems clear. WPDR had an election scheduled for April 3rd and 5th. On March 7, DONE's Parker Anderson met with the board and broke the news. They had missed the 90-day pre-election deadline for getting their procedures approved. The election would need to be postponed. The part that's fuzzy is how it came to this.



WPDR President, Gwen Vuchsas issued a news release saying that a DONE error was the problem. Vuchsas' release even said that "Anderson apologized for the error."

See Page 9. "Election Glitches"

Perspective

Replacing an Empowerment Guru Ain't Easy. But NC Input will Help

By Ken Draper

So, after at least 14 years of crafting, massaging, pitching ... and then overseeing ... this Neighborhood Council idea, Greg Nelson is going to step out of the government arena and take his act on the road. That leaves the question: How will Neighborhood Councils replace the retiring pied piper of empowerment?



No, you read the question correctly. And, anyone with the slightest inkling of why Angelenos overwhelmingly approved the Neighborhood Council concept in 1999 will understand it. Councils becoming engaged ... demanding to be involved ... in the selection of the head of the department that supports and serves their efforts is a perfect example of proactive empowerment.

See Page 7. "Perspective"

CityWatch Op & Ed

An Insider View on the Formation of a Congress of Neighborhood Councils

By Jerry Gaines

As a member of the appointed City of Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission, I spent a good deal of my time participating in the drafting of Charter Section 900, which focuses on the formation and operations of the City's Neighborhood Council system. Much of the thinking for this system was derived from a study of established systems in other cities such as Portland, Oregon and St. Paul, Minnesota.

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In these cities, efforts were made to organize grass roots stakeholders within identified communities to interact with the urban formal governmental structure. Their goal was to be at the decision maker's table before and during the process of making decisions that have a direct impact on an identified community. Historically, local communities, within an urban setting, are at some disadvantage in the decision making process because they lack key leadership skills and the resources to compete with formal lobbyists and other traditional power structures within a large city.

While forming charter language to establish a neighborhood council system, the LA Charter Commission also recognized that for certain regional issues, it would be advantageous for individual Neighborhood Councils to network for the purpose of building better understanding on those more macro issues that could impact the entire urban region.

See Page 10. "Insider View on Congress"

GuestWords

We Absolutely Need the California Clean Money Campaign: Here's Why

By Steve Twining

I need to quote columnist Bill Boyarsky from the March 19 Los Angeles Times. "We recommended that city elections be financed with public funds. That means candidates would no longer have to cozy up to contractors, land developers, union bosses and the rest of the crew that calls the shots at City Hall."

Also, the Los Angeles Daily News, from the same date: "Politicians trade taxpayer-financed favors to special interests in exchange for campaign cash. And, because a few thousand in private campaign donations can end up costing the public millions, public financing of campaigns could possibly save taxpayers a fortune."

We need growth or we will die. However, growth without infrastructure improvements is ludicrous when people are trapped in their homes because the traffic is so bad. (Steve Twining is President of the Bel Air/Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council.) ■

CITYWATCH

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

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CityWatch Op & Ed-Pg 2

Greg Nelson Era Ends

Replacing Nelson Will Not be Easy

By Brady Westwater

The Greg Nelson phrase I will always remember best is – “So how do we fix this?”

Whenever there was a problem, he never obsessed about the problem – he always just wanted to tackle the solutions. And in his role as mid-wife at the birth of both Charter Reform and the entire Neighborhood Council system – and in his handling of the individual births of over eighty councils - some of were pretty messy breech births – he needed every one of those problem solving skills – and plenty of optimism.

Greg is also the classic “doesn’t take himself at all seriously – but takes what he does deadly seriously type”. Not only did Nelson never stand on ceremony, but he wouldn’t have even recognized ceremony if he fell over it.

One major problem created by his retirement is that he is one of the few to have been with the system from the very

beginning. He has an institutional memory that is simply not replaceable. And without him to guide the new BONC commissioners as to what the neighborhood system really is, as opposed to what they think it is, working with BONC may be a bit more challenging until the new members get their sea legs.

See Page 7. “Replacing Nelson”

Praise for Nelson but Hope for Change

By Dr. Daniel Wiseman

The announcement at the BONC Meeting of March 21, by Mr. Greg Nelson, that he will resign as the General Manager of DONE surprised all present.

Mr. Nelson has been the “face, head, heart and soul” of DONE since he became DONE’s second GM. (Rosalind Stewart was the first.) The impact on DONE and the NCs should be considerable.

I write this article because it is no secret that I have been severely critical of Mr. Nelson since our first meeting in April 2002.

Mr. Nelson is to be credited and praised for the speed with which he guided the certification of the currently 88 NCs. He established the “road rules” of the NCs, clearly setting forth their position within the City Government environment. He was instrumental in the definition and application of the State laws (Brown Act, Fair Political Practices – Conflict of Interest, etc) and City ordinances (the Charter and the Plan, Citywide Election Procedures) to NC activities.

See Page 11. “Praise for Nelson. Hope for Change”

ReAction

(A brief cross-section of citywide reaction to the announced resignation of DONE GM, Greg Nelson.)

“The City of Los Angeles is going to miss him.”

-Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa

“Under his leadership, the city went from zero to 87 Neighborhood Councils and really ushered in a new way of doing business.”

--Councilwoman Janice Hahn

“Nelson was praised as the courageous leader of the city’s grass-roots political movement by some, and cursed by others as a bureaucratic tyrant ... but no one can deny that under Nelson’s leadership, the Neighborhood Council movement grew from a motley collection of a few disorganized groups to 87 certified councils with their own budgets, bylaws and a taste of political influence.”

**--Editorial
Daily News**

“Some of the city’s regulations are like they’re trying to straitjacket us. But when you think about how this never had been done before, he did a remarkable job.”

--Charles Gremer
West Hills NC

“It’s been a long road. Some of us would not be here today without your leadership and energy.”

--Bill Christopher, BONC

“Nelson deserves credit. He faced constant resistance from City Hall forces who were not interested in the dilution of their power.”

--Daily News

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NC Review Commission**E & N's 912 Show Still Playing to Small Crowds; Even Committee Fails to Show**

By Brady Westwater

The rubber – finally – was supposed to meet the road at the Education and Neighborhoods meeting last Friday. Unfortunately, despite efforts to promote the importance of the commission, interest remained lukewarm. Not only were Neighborhood Councils missing in action, but two members of the E & N Committee were absent as well. Both Janice Hahn and Jose Huizar's had schedule conflicts and left Chair Alex Padilla without a quorum.

Of the four NC people present, only one represented the official views of his council. Another voice showed up mid-meeting but offered his view on standardizing NC bylaws, which was outside of the scheduled 912 subject matter.

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Chairman Padilla soldiered on and covered a lot of ground on the main topics of the day – the name of the commission, how the commission might conduct its meetings and the commission's scope.

What's in a Name

Padilla said he felt that one year was an appropriate amount time for the evaluation commission to do its work and that he preferred to name it the "Neighborhood Council Review Commission". Janice Hahn, he thought, preferred the "912 Commission" Looks like Jose Huizar will be the swing vote on this one.

On conducting the meetings, Padilla felt that Channel 35 should televise them, the commission should meet at least once in each of the seven planning districts, that it might meet on the same day of each week/month for consistency, and that the meetings will adhere to the Brown Act.

More \$\$ for Training

As for scope – what the commission should review – ideas were plentiful. Among them: NC outreach, the training of NC board officers (Padilla suggested the possibility of giving each NC more money if their officers are trained), the funding of NC's, the definition of stakeholders and how the NC's work with each other and other city agencies.

It was also suggested that the inner workings of DONE and BONC be examined and that how Councils can work with the Brown Act be an additional item of scope.

NC Council File # Proposal

The NC Council File motion made the discussion and it appeared that Padilla was suggesting that the commission was the place to deal with it. Others suggested it was the place to review it after it had been implemented

In any case, since no votes could be taken -- the committee lacked a quorum – all of these items will need to be re-discussed and voted on at the next E & N meeting on Tuesday. The committee will also deal with other crucial topics

Need to Know

Time is running out for you to provide input on the soon to be formed NC Review Commission.

Committee is April 11.

before that: March 28 and April 5.

for a board action, you may appear in person and provide input as a stakeholder.



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From previous column

such as how the commission will be appointed and how it will submit its reports.

None of which would appear to matter much if, as one observer noted, Neighborhood Councils continue to leave their fate in the hands of the Committee and City Council." ▣



News That Was ...

DWP Hires New NC Liaison

As provided for in their Memorandum of Understanding, the Department of Water and Power added a new Neighborhood Council Liaison. He is Greg Bartz, an 18-year city government veteran whose background includes three years of working directly with Neighborhood Councils as an Executive Assistant in the Planning Department's Commission office.

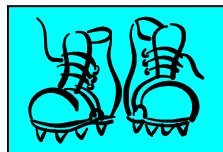
NC/DWP Memo of Understanding

Bartz will report to Lead Liaison to NCs, Paul Wang. He is the first of a

projected three direct-line contacts for Councils. Regional Liaison's are a required part of the MOU negotiated between the DWP and NCs. The MOU was implemented in the spring of last year. (**Bartz contact info: 213.367.2800 and greg.bartz@ladwp.com.**)

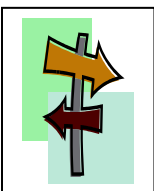
City's Union Problems Mount

Union problems for the Mayor and the City Council continue to mount. The Architects and Engineers and the Librarians are turning up the heat after being without a contract for months. The City's contracts with the Police and Firefighters are up in June. Now comes an Unfair Employee Relations Practice claim from the Service Employees (SEIU347) union because the City has begun taxing the annual \$100 boot allowance. The tax reduces the amount received by employees to \$69.73.



The Union claims that the taxing was done unilaterally and without notice. SEIU347 President, Bob Schoonover said, "It's difficult to understand how high-level city officials could be so insensitive to workers."

Holly NC Changes Mind on LANCC



Saying they had too much paperwork now and had no interest in citywide issues like LAX, the Hollywood United Neighborhood Council changed its mind and withdrew from the LA NC Congress.

With a 10-4 vote, the HUNC Board said it would wait
See next column

We've Got Mail



Change of Heart

Over all your CityWatch publication is excellent and it serves to keep Neighborhood Councils informed. I had written you that it appeared your pub was shilling for LANCC (LA NC Congress) and that was my impression based on several issues prior and now it appears the number and play on this story has toned down.

When it comes to NC news, so much more is going on than the LANCC and you most ably are covering it. Thank you.

--Pat Cross
Watts NC

◆◆◆ Been There. Heard That.

Reading Mr. Cohen's rationale ("We've Got Mail"-CityWatch-March 13) for accepting a mostly white LANCC gave me a shock of deja vu. I heard those same excuses back in the '50's. If we had continued to point to all white schools as the model back then, schools would still be integrated.

Come on, Mr. Cohen, Neighborhood Councils are for everyone and that means conducting outreach that matches the ethnic and racial traditions and cultural communications styles of all of the stakeholders. No single ethnic group, or geographical area, is the standard. People in the Valley where you are may not see NC life through the same eyes as people from the East Side or South LA.

And how, as you said, can diversity be a "controversial subject" where Neighborhood Councils are concerned? The Charter demands it. And so should you.

--Maria Taverez-Lee
Boyle Heights

◆◆◆ Watch What You Wish For

I read in the Daily News where they said that Greg Nelsons leaving the DONE was an opportunity for some fresh blood. I was around before Nelson took over. Be very, very careful what you wish for. You might get it and it could be awful.

--Danny Havens
Valley Village

◀◀ From previous column

until the "bylaws were completed" and the other issues were resolved before considering rejoining.

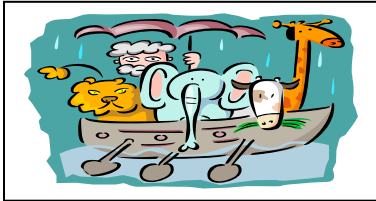
The Congress has 37 members currently. It has grown at a rate of one and a half new members a week. Outreach is projecting that the membership will have reached more than half of the certified councils in LA ... and over 65% of the viable councils ... by mid-May. ■

CityWatch Lite

And then, there was this from Elizabeth McClellan, a modern-day lesson in Project Management.

In the year 2006, the Lord came unto Noah ... who was now living in the United States ... and said, "Once again, the earth has become wicked and over-populated, and I see the end of all flesh before me. Build another Ark and save two of every living thing along with a few good humans." He gave Noah the blueprints, saying, "You have six months to build the Ark before I start the unending rain for 40 days and 40 nights."

Six months later, the Lord looked down and saw Noah weeping in his yard - but no Ark.



"Noah!" He roared, "I'm about to start the rain! Where is the Ark?"

"Forgive me, Lord," begged Noah, "but things have changed. I needed a building permit. I've been arguing with the inspector about the need for a sprinkler system. My neighbors claim that I've violated the neighborhood zoning laws by building the Ark in my yard and exceeding the height limitations. We had to go to the Development Appeal Board for a decision.

Then the Department of Transportation demanded a bond be posted for the future costs of moving power lines and other overhead obstructions, to clear the passage for the Ark's move to the sea. I told them that the sea would be coming to us, but they would hear nothing of it. Getting the wood was another problem. There's a ban on cutting local trees in order to save the spotted owl. I tried to convince the environmentalists that I needed the wood to save the owls - but no go. When I started gathering the animals, an animal rights group sued me. They insisted that I was confining wild animals against their will. They argued the accommodations were too restrictive, and it was cruel and inhumane to put so many animals in a confined space.

Then the EPA ruled that I couldn't build the Ark until they'd conducted an environmental impact study on your proposed flood. I'm still trying to resolve a complaint with the Human Rights Commission on how many minorities I'm supposed to hire for my building crew. Immigration and Naturalization is checking the green-card status of most of the people who want to work. The trade unions say I can't use my sons. They insist I have to hire only union workers with Ark-building experience. To make matters worse, the IRS seized all my assets, claiming I'm trying to leave the country illegally with endangered species. So, forgive me, Lord, but it would take at least 10 years for me to finish this Ark."

Punch line: Next column

CityWatch

2006 Assignments

◆ **The NC Congress Liability Debate**
The views and the passion

◆ **Can the City, DONE and NCs Collaborate on an Emergency Preparedness Net?**
Not likely, some say

◆ **Protecting LA's Animal Population**
One of the day's sexy issues

◆ **Top Six Requirements for Running the DONE**
CityWatch offers a job description

◆ **The Best LA City Council Ever?**
Our panel and our readers have opinions

Next CityWatch:

April 3 ...

...ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU

**We
Don't
Report
The
News ...**

**We
Report
What
The
News ...
Means.**

CITYWATCH:KNOWMORE

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Suddenly the skies cleared, the sun began to shine, and a rainbow stretched across the sky. Noah looked up in wonder and asked, "You mean you're not going to destroy the world?" "No," said the Lord. "The government has beaten me to it."



Replacing Nelson-From Page 3

But what makes Nelson even harder to replace are the people skills that made him so unique. Greg's office door was always open, he always picked up his own phone, he freely gave out his own cell phone number – and he promptly returned both e-mails and phone calls.

He was always there for us.

He also saw his job as working with us and not trying to manage us. But he also knew that his ultimate loyalty was to the man who had appointed him – the Mayor. And even if he may not have always agreed with what was handed him – he always fully represented the Mayor's point of view to us while also telling us that the ultimate choice was always ours.

Good News

The good news about all this: After taking some much deserved vacation time, Nelson is going to dive right back into Neighborhood Council system. He has said that he wants to work with any council that might need his assistance. That includes the LA NC Congress if needed.

So watch out City Hall. Greg Nelson is coming back. Except this time – he's off the leash.

Perspective-From Page 1

The Mayor said he is going to launch a nationwide search for Nelson's replacement. That's impressive for a couple of reasons. First, that was the process used to locate Gail Goldberg, the new Planning Director. That the Mayor thinks enough of Neighborhood Councils to use the same pattern for selecting a new DONE chief should provide a degree of comfort for NCs.

It would be even more comforting to know that he planned to use the whole Planning Director selection model. With Planning, Neighborhood Councils were given a considerable amount of opportunity to weigh in. At hearings and otherwise. And, of critical importance, NCs had a representative on the final review committee whose job it was to cull from six to eight finalists, the one or two top of the crop candidates that were then sent to the Mayor. Neighborhood Councils should push for at least as much opportunity to advise and influence the naming of the new head of the Neighborhood Empowerment Department.

What Should New GM Be

Neighborhood Council leaders should be formulating a job description now. Should be preparing the emails, letters and calls for the Mayor and the Mayor's Deputy, Larry Frank, reminding them that NCs deserve the same selection model that the Planning Department got ... and more. Because this is their department.

Councils, it's time to start your proactive empowerment engines.

Empowerment Guru Nelson would be the first to tell you that that's exactly the way he drew it up. ■

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Greg Nelson Announcement



"I am thankful for every opportunity that I have been given to serve my city. It is time to continue promoting participation in government and grass-roots democracy in new ways. Near the end of April I will be retiring."

--Greg Nelson, GM
DONE

How to Send Community Impact Statement

Fax

- To City Clerk:
213.978.1079

Mail or Hand-deliver

- City Clerk
200 N Spring St
City Hall (Rm 395)
LA 90012

Internet

- <http://appla1.lacity.org/cis>

(Community Impact Statements
are limited to 100 words)

CITYWATCH DayPlanner

WEEK OF MARCH 27, 2006



City Council

March 28, 29, 31 (10 a.m.)
City Hall (Council Chamber)

Education & Neighborhoods

March 28

City Hall (Check Council Calendar for time & room)

- ◆ 912 Commission—Commission name, meeting requirements, scope of work

LA NC Congress

Saturday, April 1 (10 a.m.)
DWP Bldg
Hope & First Streets

FUTURES

Proposed-Central Region High School #14

Wednesday, April 5 (6 p.m.)
Mt Vernon Middle School Auditorium
4066 West 17th St
◆ Site selection update meeting

Education & Neighborhoods

April 5 & 11
City Hall

- ◆ NC Review Commission

Landmark THIS Workshop

Saturday, April 8 (10 a.m.)
National Cntr Preservation of Democracy
111N Central Ave
◆ Put on by LA Conservancy—Learn how to protect important historic sites in your community

LA Housing Dept/Rent Adjustment Com

Thursday, April 13 (12 n)
Hearing Room
1200 West 7th Street (Ste 100)
◆ Discussion: Reduction of rent where there is a reduction of services

North Hills West Arts & Crafts Fair

Sunday, April 22 (10a-5p)
VA Campus
16111 Plummer Street
Admission Free
Details: NorthhillswestNC@aol.com



CityWatch 2006 Assignments

- ◆ The NC Congress Liability Debate
The views and the passion
- ◆ Can the City, DONE and NCs Collaborate on an Emergency Preparedness Net?
Not likely, some say
- ◆ Protecting LA's Animal Population
One of the day's sexy issues
- ◆ Top Six Requirements for Running the DONE
CityWatch offers a job description
- ◆ The Best LA City Council Ever?
Our panel and our readers have opinions

Next CityWatch:

April 3 ...

...ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU

SuperPlanner



Beginning April 3 in CITYWATCH

Face it, with the advent of the NC Congress, the MOUs in progress, City-wide projects like the Emergency Preparedness Network, the numerous established Alliances and coalitions, NC calendars are beginning to blur.

Beginning March 27, CityWatch will provide some order to your schedule with a complete six-month listing of advance meeting dates for citywide events, organizations and projects.

Take a look at the future.

Look for **SuperPlanner**

Beginning April 3 in CITYWATCH

Election Glitches-From Page 1

Two days later, DONE GM, Greg Nelson, posted his response. "To date," he said, "the NCWPDR has not affirmatively responded to several official requests ... to amend the Neighborhood Council's bylaws and their Election Procedures." Some of the dispute appears to be over whether WPDR's submissions were, in fact, what was requested of them.

A frustrated board complained that candidates had invested their own money for campaigning and that the council had invested city funding for outreach materials. Expenditures, DONE says, that cannot be reimbursed. WPDR Election Committee Chair, Cozette Vergari said that the situation was incredibly frustrating. "No one is more frustrated than I am," she said.

A new election date has yet to be set. The earliest it could be held, reminds Vergari, is late July, not a popular time for some of the candidates.

In the meantime, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners unanimously approved the first decertification in the six year history of



LA's Neighborhood Councils: Old Northridge. The Departments Staff Report cited five violations of the City Plan in their recommendation for decertification, but chief among them was the claim that Old Northridge, certified in March of 2002, had simply never held a legitimate election.

DONE demonstrated exceptional patience, some feel, considering ONNC failed to conduct its very first election. DONE's records show their first efforts to resolve the council's election issues dates back to December, 2002.

As one Valley Council President said, "No one can feel good about the death of a Neighborhood Council. Least of all, those of us who have been involved with NCs for a lot of years and really care."

As for what Old Northridge had been doing all these years, "We've been doing our own thing," answered Don Larsen, the only President the council has known.

The telling question seems to be, was the Old Northridge doing the stakeholder's thing?

Westchester and Old Northridge are not the only NCs suffering from election dysfunction. The list is lengthy. Wilshire Center Koreatown, Greater Wilshire, Grassroots Venice, Cypress Park are some of the names.

The question is: Why? DONE, and LA's Neighborhood Councils have been at it for more than four years. Citywide Election Procedures were approved by the City Council more than a year ago. Everyone has at least a year to prepare for an election. As the guy we quoted in this story's lead said, "How tough can this be?"

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Legal Tips

Whose Fence?

Q: No one knows who built the fence between my home and my neighbor's, or when. We both thought it was our boundary.

Recently, he hired an engineer who said the fence is a foot inside his property line. My neighbor insists I move it back a foot. That will force me to dig up my roses. Can he force me to do that after all these years?

A: He can probably force you to move the fence, if you accept his survey. Before hiring a contractor, consider obtaining your own survey. Not all engineers reach the same conclusions.

If you eventually do move the fence, perhaps you can induce your neighbor to share the cost. It would be a neighborly thing to do.

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An Insider View-From Page 2

Therefore, we included language that called for the city's Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (upon request from several individual certified Neighborhood Councils) to facilitate opportunities for a citywide gathering of representatives to learn about each other and to learn about pending macro citywide issues that could impact the city as a whole.

Recently, efforts have been made within the city to organize a council or federation of Neighborhood Councils (known as Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Congress or LANCC).



This is a promising activity and demonstrates that there are a growing number of local Neighborhood Council leaders recognizing that there is both a local grass roots community focus and a macro citywide focus that they need to become familiar with to facilitate true quality advice to the city's formal decision makers.



Recent discussions with some of those involved in the LANCC formation process seem to indicate that there is recognition that local community focus or identity must be retained as thought is placed on a macro citywide issue. In other words each Neighborhood Council must first educate its own community members about such a citywide issue, making its own conclusions, before sharing its views with others.

Positions need to be locally driven, not lobbied for by other Neighborhood Councils and other pressure groups outside of the identified Neighborhood Council boundaries.

Roles Defined

What may help in the defining of roles between local grassroots Neighborhood Councils and what should happen at a citywide gathering is the fact that each Neighborhood Council is certified by the city and operates on city public funds. The proposed LANCC is not a city certified entity and is not funded directly by city funds (other than DONE lending assistance services to arrange for meetings).

What is important is that empowerment stay local with each certified neighborhood council on any issue micro or macro. However, city decision makers would be taking a great risk to ignore a reading on a macro issue that is made by a joint statement coming out of a citywide meeting of neighborhood delegates. Individual Neighborhood Councils should be willing to look outside their boundaries at macro issues. But any advice on such issues needs to be developed at the neighborhood level with grass roots debate from the key stakeholders of that specific neighborhood. At no time would I support a citywide organization that would in effect trump the first priority of each Neighborhood Council to focus on what are the priorities of that specific neighborhood or community.

LANCC is Healthy Exercise

The formation of the LANCC is a healthy exercise that seems to be a sign that the Neighborhood Council system is maturing into a locally driven process to foster better local government decision making. This was our goal in drafting Charter language that formed the Neighborhood Council system. I commend those who are investing their volunteer time to make Los Angeles a world class city with grass roots democracy as part of the landscape for seeking improved quality of life for all stakeholders. *(Jerry Gaines is a former Los Angeles Charter Reform Commissioner and participated in the drafting of Charter Section 900, which mandates the creation of Neighborhood Councils.)*

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LANCC Status Report

The LA Neighborhood Council Congress membership continues to grow at the rate of a little more than a council a week. There are now 37.

The following Neighborhood Councils have joined the LANCC as of March 27.

Arroyo Seco
 Atwater Village
 Bel Air Beverly Crest
 Canoga Park
 Central San Pedro
 Coastal San Pedro
 Del Rey
 Downtown Los Angeles
 Encino
 Granada Hills North
 Grass Roots Venice
 Greater Griffith Park
 Harbor Gateway South
 Historic Cultural
 Historic Highland Park
 Mar Vista
 Mid City WEST
 Mid-Town North Hollywood
 North Hills West
 Northwest San Pedro
 Northridge West
 Pacoima
 Pico Union
 Reseda
 Silver Lake
 South Robertson
 Studio City
 Tarzana
 United Neighborhoods
 Valley Village
 West Hills
 West Los Angeles
 West Van Nuys / Lake Balboa
 Westchester / Playa del Rey
 Westside
 Winnetka
 Woodland Hills-Warner Center

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CITYWATCH:KNOWMORE

Praise Nelson. Hope for Change

From Page 3

These are no small accomplishments and I doubt that anyone without Mr. Nelson's long service to the City of Los Angeles could have done as well.

My criticisms and, therefore, my views as to the changes we may see in DONE and its relationships with NCs relate to Mr. Nelson's background, his orientation, attitude and approach. Mr. Nelson was the "perfect (city) company man." His administration and its policies made it clear that he wanted the NCs to be typical L.A. City Government entities. They are NOT ... and that was his principle failing.

Two Major Issues

The two major issues that have always faced NCs are (1) the role of NCs as "advisors" and their ability to criticize the actions of our City Officials and Departments and (2) the extraordinarily broad definition of "stakeholder" that includes non-residents (property owners & workers) and non-citizens (legal and "illegal" aliens) and permits them full participation in NC actions.

Mr. Nelson did little or nothing to help resolve these problems. He may have made them worse because the "entrenched" powers-that-be in our City Government and the opportunities and roles of NCs are "natural enemies."

Mr. Nelson's second failing was his inability to guide DONE in policies of support, nurturing and healing the natural failings and disputes of the large numbers of inexperienced, "new" NC stakeholders (Board Members and non-Board Members. "Training" is not necessarily an "Educational Experience." Overzealous application of "Rules and Regulations," imposing sanctions, disciplinary actions and threats of adverse decisions do not help fledgling NCs become mature and effective democratic entities.

Supporting Protective Discipline

Some of my NC colleagues actively support this policy of "protective discipline" but I do not. I find it arbitrary and contrary to the "growth and development" of our NCs.

After praising Mr. Nelson for his very real accomplishments, I look forward to a new and different policy, attitude and approach from DONE when its next General Manager is appointed. I would like to see DONE become more professional, that is, to consider the needs of the NCs before the needs of the DONE staff and the City "powers-that-be." I think that NCs should be allowed the independence necessary to fulfill their role as critics of the City and the "lobbyist" of the people.

DONE should encourage the widest range of advocacy ... after all the NCs should represent not only all of the citizens of L.A. but also to non-resident and non-citizen participants in L.A. city life.

See next column

**We
Don't
Report
The
News ...**

**We
Report
What
The
News ...
Means.**

CITYWATCH:KNOWMORE

...

From previous column

DONE should develop better "people skills" and learn how to identify, evaluate and work to resolve all kinds of disputes.

DONE should provide better guidance (without "police" control) to NCs when they set up their offices, pay their bills and develop their projects.

DONE should shift its "educational activities" from small-minded "trainings" and, DONE should foster NC-generated solutions to NC problems (Brown Act, grievances, elections) instead of imposing DONE-oriented, CITY-oriented solutions.

It's time for the NCs to "grow up" and it's time for DONE to help them "grow up." (*Dr. Daniel Wiseman is community activist and a member of the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council board.*) ■

Voices

Forward your views on the Greg Nelson resignation, and its impact on NCs, to Editor@CityWatchLA.com