

## Homeowners see hope in vacancy for Neighborhood Empowerment board

By P.R. McDonald, Los Angeles Independent News  
9-2-99

With the recent resignation of a nominee for the Board of the Neighborhood Empowerment Commission, homeowners' associations and neighborhood groups see an opening for better representation.

"It leaves another opportunity for the mayor to make an appointment from the community," says Fran Reichenbach, secretary of the Beachwood Canyon Neighborhood Association. "A lot of people feel this way. They're looking from within their groups to fill this hole."

When Mayor Richard Riordan released his nominations for the Board of the Neighborhood Empowerment Commission in early August, many homeowners' associations and neighborhood groups in Los Angeles felt left out of the process to form Neighborhood Councils. The board, along with the general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, will form the rules by which Neighborhood Councils will be established. With the resignation of Carrie Castro Amour, however, people like Reichenbach hope the mayor will correct himself.

Amour, a San Fernando Valley resident who teaches high school, dropped out of the nomination process two weeks ago. Although the Mayor's Office has yet to receive a letter of resignation from Amour, Riordan spokeswoman Ashleigh Adams claims there were no "backroom politics" that forced the sudden bailout. Adams believes "time constraints" was the primary reason. Amour declined to comment about the matter.

Amour's resignation comes just a few weeks before the City Council's Governmental Efficiency Committee will consider the nominations on Sept. 9. Third District City Councilwoman Laura Chick, who also chairs the Ad Hoc Committee on Charter Implementation, chairs the committee. Gary Boze, Chick's communications deputy, says that despite Amour's departure, "the process is continuing as scheduled."

Jessica Copen, a spokeswoman for the mayor, says another nominee must be selected by the end of September, but she did not know if that selection would be made before the Sept. 9 hearing. "We're trying to fill it as soon as possible," Copen says.

The spokeswoman also says the mayor is aware of the concerns of homeowners and neighborhood groups and claims, "We're trying to involve someone with a lot of neighborhood experience." Within homeowners' and neighborhood circles, two names are already making the rounds: Merle M. Singer and Gordon Murley.

While Murley isn't actively seeking the nomination - he doesn't want to be a "shill" for Riordan - Singer believes she would be an asset to the board of commissioners. "I have respect for all the [city government] entities," Singer says. "We all need to work together. It makes sense. So I think I have a good vision."

Singer was one of 40 people interviewed by the Mayor's Office for the first round of selections. The former Yucca corridor resident - she now lives in the Hollywood Hills - started the Las Palmas Lions Neighborhood Watch, which used non-confrontational methods to rid that neighborhood of drug dealers, and founded the Yucca Corridor Coalition of Property Owners and Managers. She is currently the president of the coalition and civilian co-chair of the Hollywood Community Police Advisory Board.

"The issue of neighborhood empowerment is very important," Singer says about the possibility of serving as a commissioner. "If it's done right, it can be an exciting opportunity for the community to participate."

Singer also believes someone with a community organizing background should be on the board. "We're talking about neighborhood empowerment," she says, "so it would seem reasonable if one, if not all, of the nominees were involved in the community."

Murley is less enthusiastic about the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, but he claims, "I'm willing to help the public." Murley, founder and president of the Woodland Hills Homeowners' Organization and former chairman of the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations, believes Neighborhood Councils have the opportunity to "disenfranchise" groups like his because, he says, "the only ones who can speak for the neighborhoods are the neighborhood councils."

For someone who has been lobbied by other community activists to seek the nomination, Murley takes a rather combative stance toward the prospective Neighborhood Councils. "None of these [nominees] know what goes on," Murley says, "They're [the mayor's] handpicked shills."

The longtime Woodland Hills resident also claims Riordan never selects

someone who acts independently on a commission and says, "I know this mayor. He'll probably pick someone crappy and cruddy who doesn't know what they're doing."

Reichenbach, though, thinks Murley would be a wonderful nominee.

Murley calls the current list of nominees "the usual suspects." In one week, Angelenos will find out what Chick and her colleagues think of them.