

City Watch

The Inside Track to a Changing City...

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NC's Come to the Valley (Again)

DONE held its 11th Neighborhood Council workshop and thirrd Valley meeting Tuesday night at the Northeast Valley Senior Center, covering the Arleta, Pacoima, Sylmar, Sunland, Tujunga, Lake View Terrace, La Tuna Canyon, Shadow Hills and Sun Valley communities. In addition to the citizen participation, appearances were made by 7th District Councilmember Alex Padilla, former Elected Charter Reform Commissioner Anne Finn (2nd District), and former Appointed Charter Reform Commissioner Jose De Sosa, who stayed the entire meeting to discuss the issues with his neighbors. Finn commented to City Watch that she was "very impressed. This process has given me renewed confidence in the process and in our work (on the Charter.)"

What was immediately noticeable was the demographics of those in attendance: not their area, but rather their affiliation. While not the "common breed" of participants (i.e. homeowners groups, neighborhood associations, and "hardcore" community members), Facilitator Gary De La Rosa of the City Human Relations Commission noted, "the participants at this workshop were not associated with any organized group, but there was a good balance between homeowners associations, neighborhood association and citizens who just wanted to get involved with the (NC) process."

Concerns were raised over the delivery of services to areas that might be counted as San Fernando City and the "borderline" residents of both San Fernando City and Los Angeles. Anther issue discussed was ethnicity, raised by the Spanish speaking group, from which one member rose to state that concerns needed to be "ethnically based, as every ethnicity will have their own ethnic needs and problems."

Rounding off the problems raised at the workshop and possible solutions was the amount of gang activity in the surrounding areas.

Juan Urbina, resident of Pacoima, added to the debate: "If there were job opportunities in our communities, the gang members would have someplace to go and something to do," citing the lack of business and employment opportunities in their communities.

As the DONE's July deadline draws nearer, the list of community complaints like these pile higher and higher.

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Can Neighborhood Councils Be Effective Without City Funding?

By Barbara Fine

(Barbara Fine, who passed away two weeks ago, was a longtime community activist and served as an advisor to the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations and the Benedict Canyon Association.)

Monitoring needed to Assure Open Meetings and City-Provided Indemnity

At the well-attended meetings and workshops now being held throughout the city by the new Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), and at private workshops as well, the outlines of what the Plan for Neighborhood Councils will contain is beginning to be understood by citizens. And what is beginning to be known leaves more questions than answers for community empowerment.

Proposed Budget Geared to Aid Department Rather than Councils

The Mayor's budget has proposed about \$4.5 million during the next fiscal year beginning July 1 for both DONE and the establishment of Area Planning Commissions within the Planning Department. Some \$2 million of this is earmarked for expanded DONE staff to complete the charter-mandated Plan for Neighborhood Councils by December, because the Council and Mayor must add any changes by June 2001; their failure to act means the Plan will become law as written by DONE and approved by the DONE Commission. More funds will be expended in publicizing it and in assisting and approving those Councils which apply for certification early.

DONE General Manager Rosalind Stewart was asked to explain the

Department's budget at the recent workshop held by the University of Southern California Neighborhood Participation Project. Repeated questioning from attendees including Hillside Federation President Steve Twining, failed to bring forward definitive answers from Ms. Stewart, except for the fact that four offices will be set up and staffed throughout the city to provide a meeting place, if desired, for the Councils as well as a computer and other office equipment. However, during one of the workshops she admitted that the Councils will have an annual "battle of the budget" on their hands and will need help from the public if they are to receive even minimal City support.

The paucity of funding for the Councils means they will be on their own for operating expenses, since the DONE is covering only its own operation. According to Greg Nelson, Deputy to Councilmember Joel Wachs and point man for the Neighborhood Councils, discussions for future funding include setting up many more offices and meeting places. Staffing for these satellite sites would probably not be provided by additional city employees, since options now being considered would be to have staff under contract of for hire by each Council.

Brown Act Requirement for Open Meeting Not Yet Decided - Pressure form Public Needed

Because N.C.'s are part of the new City Charter, the current ordinance approved by the City last July authorizes the DONE and provides an outline for items each Council would need to take into account as part of its governance. Included is to be a guarantee that all meetings are to be open to the public and provide a means for stakeholder participation in the decision-making process.

Not specifically mentioned, but definitely implied by this is that the Councils, as City-authorized bodies, are to be subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act, a 1953 state statute setting requirements for state and local government agencies (but not the State Legislature!) to post fixed agendas at least 72 hours prior to meetings, open meetings for most discussions, and accessible records of all proceedings. Local agencies by definition include advisory groups and private, non-profit organizations receiving any public funds for public uses.

Yet despite this requirement, it has been learned that Joel Wachs' office has in the past questioned the applicability of the Brown Act to Neighborhood Councils. Greg Nelson, however, has stated that while Joel Wachs is now firmly committed to Brown Act provisions, a new staff member in the City Attorney's office is "looking into something." (City Attorney James Hahn is a declared Mayoral candidate as is Joel Wachs.) It appears that public exposure and continued pressure on City elected officials is still needed on this important issue.

Indemnification for Councils and for Speakers Before Them not Being Addressed

First Amendment rights under the US Constitution, notwithstanding, there has been no attempt to address the significant issue of providing City protection for the Councils and for speakers addressing them against the threat of intimidating

legal action from people and interests in opposition to certain points of view. Although the City provides self-insurance for its own employees and decision makers, current thinking does not support having it include the Neighborhood Councils.

What was mentioned some time ago, according to Greg Nelson, was providing private insurance coverage in its stead. This matter must be brought front and center and adequate insurance coverage of some sort provided, because if the Councils are left to their own devices to raise funds for indemnification it will be difficult to obtain and prohibitively expensive. As private, non-profit corporations, most homeowner associations have experienced these difficulties firsthand.

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Board of Neighborhood Commissioners Holds Third Official Meeting

Using the 11th Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE) community meeting on Neighborhood Councils (NCs) as a backdrop, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners met to hash out issues ranging from the mailing of survey results out to the community to the upcoming Neighborhoods USA conference.

The third official meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order without Commissioners Chris Pak and Sister Jennie Lechtenberg, who has not been as visible a presence as her colleagues on the Commission at the workshops. Hearing from a number of citizens on subjects ranging from the possible violation of the Brown Act (in organizing NC meetings) to the funding of these councils, the Commissioners parlayed questions to General Manager Rosalind Stewart and Assistant City Attorney Gwen Pointdexter for the most part, with Commission President Lee Kanon Alpert taking a few as well.

The Commissioners discussed changes to the format of the surveys being sent out as a "summary" as recommended by Commissioner Keith Weaver. Weaver stated to DONE staff, "I go to the workshops every week, but to someone who has never been to the meeting (it might be harder to understand)."

Greg Nelson, Chief Deputy for Councilmember Joel Wachs, then gave a presentation regarding the Neighborhoods USA conference to be held in Phoenix next week. Nelson has volunteered to be the organizer of the Los Angeles delegation. Alpert noted that he "really appreciating (Nelson's) time, especially in Councilman Wachs' 'time of need'," alluding to Wachs' mayoral campaign.

The Commission postponed a discussion on ethics and the City's conflict of interest policy for the next meeting and with that, the workshop was to begin.

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Public Workshop Announcement:

**Your Voice
Your Neighborhood
Your City**

Help define the guidelines for your Neighborhood Council "Plan."

Join the Los Angeles City Board of Neighborhood Commissioners and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment for a public workshop creating "The Plan" for Neighborhood Councils.

For more information, call (213) 485-1360.

June 7

**Central City Area - Central City North Area - Westlake Area
DWP Building, Portland Room
111 N. Hope St.
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

June 14

**Canoga Park – Winnetka – Woodland Hills Area
Reseda – West Van Nuys Area
Encino – Tarzana Area
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
18605 Erwin St.
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

June 20

***Commission Meeting & * Workshop Watts Labor Community Action Committee
Southeast L. A. Area 10950 S. Central Ave.
South L. A. Area *Commission meeting 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.
*Workshop 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

June 28

**Sherman Oaks – Studio City – Toluca Lake Area
North Hollywood Area
CBS Studios
4024 Radford Ave. (Parking off Colfax Street)
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

July 6

**Boyle Heights Area
Puente Learning Center
501 S. Boyle Ave.
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

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