

Preparations for Neighborhood Councils Come Up Short, Groups Charge

By ROBERT GREENE
Staff Writer

A coalition of Los Angeles community organizations yesterday charged that the city agency laying the groundwork for neighborhood councils is leaving many residents out of the planning process.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, formed a year ago after voters adopted a new city charter calling for advisory councils in neighborhoods throughout the city, has failed to reach residents who aren't already involved in homeowner or other groups, members of Communities United for Real Empowerment said.

"We are concerned and frustrated by the current city process," Adrienne Shropshire of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Alliance said. "There has been a clear lack of thoughtful planning."

Shropshire and others decried an outreach process that they said failed to notify even some of the city's most active residents that a DONE "workshop" on organizing neighborhood councils was slated for their area.

Oreatha Ensley, a member of the widely-touted Eight District Empowerment Congress launched by Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, said DONE never consulted with the Congress to get input on how to create successful neighborhood groups.

"There's a model for neighborhood councils right here in this city," Ensley said. "There's no need to start from ground zero."

Neighborhood groups must be pulled into the planning process, she said, "before it becomes—excuse the pun—a DONE deal."

Among the complaints leveled by CURE members at a City Hall news conference and again at the City Council meeting were that DONE failed to provide sufficient translation services at 16 community workshops held around the city over the last six months, failed to provide childcare so that parents with young children could participate and failed to provide transportation to and from the sessions.

The workshops were also poorly organized and facilitators failed to allow participants to seek consensus or fully discuss the issues before them, Bong Hwa Kim of the MultiCultural Collaborative said.

"We are here to let people know that traditionally ignored communities cannot be left behind again," Kim said.

Member groups, which include the largest union of city employees, the organization that successfully pressed for "living wage" requirements for city contractors, and church and ethnic associations, also blasted DONE for failing to create an advisory committee, as instructed by the council earlier this year.

DONE General Manager Rosalind Stewart noted that the Los Angeles Unified School District provided translation services at half the workshops in many languages. She acknowledged that childcare and transportation were not provided, and said the agency planned to partner with other organizations to provide those services at future phases of the neighborhood councils planning process.

"We are very pleased to hear constructive feedback," Stewart said. "This is not interpreted as a negative. We all have the same ultimate goal—empowering communities. We would ask most graciously for them to participate with us."

The city's efforts to contact groups and individuals not traditionally reached by official efforts have been at issue from the beginning of the neighborhood council process.

The appointed commission that sets policy for DONE initially balked at a request by Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg that professional organizers form an advisory committee to assure that all segments of the population were brought into the process. But the commission later relented and joined in instructing Stewart to name such a board.

To this day, Goldberg said, the people whose names she submitted as potential advisors have not been contacted.

The commission also expressed skepticism in February when the department hired the Lee Andrews Group of downtown to pull residents into the process and Catherine M. Schuster Consulting of Hollywood for "facilitating" the workshops.

A total of about 2,000 residents participated in the 16 sessions, commission President Lee Kanon Alpert said.

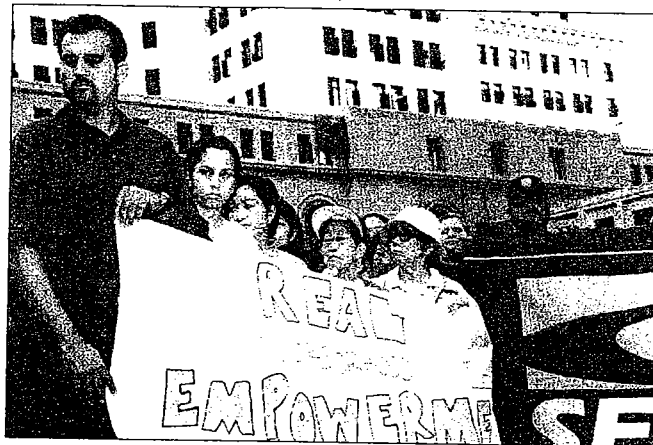
"Our policy is to reach as many people as we possibly can with the short time and the limited budget we have," Alpert said. "If the job has not been done we need to address the problem. I don't think anyone's comments should be minimized. My hope is that this group will continue to work with our department."

Stewart said she has been asked to report on the progress of her department to the council's Governmental Efficiency Committee Monday afternoon.

Having completed the workshop phase, DONE staff will now begin to draft an official "plan" that will set forth the details of organizing and running neighborhood councils, Stewart said.

The draft is to be released in September and will be followed by "learning sessions" for the public, then public hearings before the commission. The plan is to be turned into the City Council and mayor in December, and the council will have up to six months to debate it before adopting a final template, Stewart said.

Residents will be able to add their comments and critiques at every step of the way, Stewart said.



Concerned community members demand accountability in process to develop citywide network of neighborhood councils yesterday at a press conference on the south patio at City Hall East.

—Staff Photograph by Thu Nguyen

Council Voted 13-0 to Designate Chase Knolls Apartments as Historic Cultural Monument

(CNS)—The Los Angeles City Council spared the Chase Knolls Apartments from the bulldozers—at least for now—by yesterday designating the site a historical-cultural monument.

The council's 13-0 vote means there will be a one-year moratorium on demolishing the Sherman Oaks units while an evaluation is conducted to determine what alternatives developers might have.

Councilman Mike Feuer, whose district includes the 260-unit complex, has pushed for preservation of the units.

He said the complex exemplifies "the Garden City apartment movement." Such apartments offered an affordable alternative to single-family homes for the surging population of post-World War II Los Angeles.

"There are economically viable alternatives to demolishing Chase Knolls," he told his colleagues before the vote. "If we do not take this opportunity, this piece of history will be lost to us."

But Legacy Partners, the developer seeking to tear down Chase Knolls to build 400 luxury apartments, contends that the complex—built in 1949—is hardly worthy of historic designation.

"We are extremely concerned that a legitimate historical designation review process has been misused to placate the interests of a few," said Legacy senior vice president Dennis Cavallari.

"This designation only delays the inevitability that existing tenants will have to relocate, whether new units are ultimately constructed, or if existing units are rehabilitated to current building and safety codes."

Councilman Joel Wachs said the apartments are worth saving.

"It's a lot about a way of life," he said. "It's about a sense of community. It's about family. It's about a sense of identity, a sense of place. That's what this city is desperately longing for."