

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

June 1, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 11

CITY WATCH
Inside This Issue
(6 Pages)

- ✦ **It's Summer In The City Issues Heat up-Pg 2**
- ✦ **Is the Agreement with Public Works Working? A Conversation With Paul Waters-Pg 2**
- ✦ **Clock is Ticking for NC's to Get in on DWP Partnership -Pg 3**

CITY WATCH

We publish City Watch to promote grassroots civic engagement through information and ideas.

City Watch is distributed to Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils representing more than 3,000,000 stakeholders.

City Watch is published by CityWatchGroup, an independent, nonprofit organization, in association with the Citywide Alliance of Neighborhood Councils.

City Watch is published electronically on Monday of every other week. Share it with your Neighborhood Council and other activists.

Mark Siegel
Founder

Ken Draper
Editor

Contact Information
323.937.0504
sirken323@aol.com
allncs.org

We welcome your comments

Landfill Threatens City with Rate Increase, Trash Lockout

NC Activist Calls It a Citywide Issue for LA Councils

By David Lowell

The owners of the Sunshine Canyon Landfill in Granada Hills have given the City an ultimatum: Extend the contract and sign off on proposed fees or face a rate increase and a possible refusal to accept the City's trash. And, in the process may have sparked yet another Neighborhood Council opposition crusade.

In a letter to the Bureau of Sanitation, Browning-Ferris Industries (BFI) says it "incurred significant additional costs" from the delays in permitting from the State and the City. They blame the delays on opposition from "certain City officials and a small local group" and estimate the dollar damage at over \$20 million. The current contract runs until 2006, but BFI wants that extended to 2010 now, or else.

The Mayor and much of City Council have said in the past that they will not renew with BFI after 2006. Thus, the showdown.

In his letter to the Sanitation Department, BFI District Manager, Greg Doughmane, that if they are not interested in a long-term contract extension, there will be negative consequences. Rates could increase "up to 50%, starting this July 1, and Sunshine Canyon could stop accepting City trash before the end of the contract.

Continued on Page 5. See "Landfill"

Perspective

Why Do LA's Neighborhood Councils Have So Much Trouble with Elections?

By Ken Draper

Sometime this month, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners will ask six Neighborhood Councils to show up and explain why they haven't held an election. Or, at least, haven't held one in a reasonable period of time.

One Wilshire Center council canceled its election literally hours before the polls were to open. Further up the Wilshire corridor, two divergent groups that came together for certification, can't get on the same election page. South Robertson was a long-time successful residential association on the edge of Beverly Hills. They were certified almost two years ago and have yet to either muster up the will or get a grasp on the fine art of conducting an election.

Of all the stumbling blocks, large and small, tripping up Neighborhood Councils, nothing tops the neighborhood election process. Even councils that have been effective in every other regard have had issues with their elections. Here are some of the reasons why.

Continued on Page 6. See "Perspective"

Note: City Watch arrived on Tuesday this issue because of the holiday.

Issues**It's Summer In the City: Issues Heat Up**

By David Lowell

Memorial Day marks the unofficial start of summer in LA and already political temperatures are starting to climb. From the landfill battle to the LAX expansion, from Inclusionary Zoning to the Solar Incentive program, the City's agenda is full of passion-producing issues.

LAX Expansion

The Mayor has been working for months to find a Los Angeles Airport modernization plan that will both work and provide sufficient support to get passed. The Plan's latest incarnation will come before the Planning and Airport Commissioners on **June 14**. Councilmember Cindy Miscikowski will be pushing her alternate "consensus" plan as well.

Solar Incentive Program

Also on **June 14**, the DWP Commission will consider the various controversial issues attached to the restoration of the LADWP Solar Incentive Program. The program fizzled in early 2003 when it ran out of rebate funds. Given some dollars and a new life, DWP is preparing to restore the program but there is sizable disagreement over whether the emphasis should be on the residential or commercial sector.

Inclusionary Zoning

Few issues provoke the kind of passionate debate that the Inclusionary Zoning issue generates. The City has asked Neighborhood Councils to weigh in on this hot subject, and many have and will. The current mandatory ordinance being floated, along with background materials, is available on the Citywide Alliance website (www.allncs.org). The motion, in some form, should come before the City Council in **early August**.

Continued on Page 4. See "Summer Issues"

City Watch Conversation with: Paul Waters**What Does the DPW Deal Mean to the Rest of US?**

(Almost five months ago, the Department of Public Works and four East Valley Neighborhood Councils signed an agreement to work together "in the enhancement and efficiency of the delivery of services ... to the community." This is a pilot project, setup and steered by the University of Southern California's Terry Cooper. How much has been accomplished so far and what does this really mean to other Neighborhood Councils? We asked Paul Waters, who crafted the agreement and has steered the project from its inception.)

City Watch: It's been almost five months. Anything happening with your DPW-NC project?

Paul Waters: The first of the Annual Service Plans has been delivered to Mid Town North Hollywood.

City Watch: For the uninitiated, what is a Service Plan?

Waters: The Annual Service Plan is called for in the Memorandum of Understanding. It's an assessment of everything Public Works touches. Streets, sidewalks, trees, sewers, storm drains, street sweeping, trash pickup. Everything.

City Watch: O.K. Now, in real terms, how is a Neighborhood Council actually involved in the process? For example, with pot holes and streets in my neighborhood.

Waters: The first part of it is an assessment from DPW of what's going on now. The condition your streets are in. The second part is the work DPW is planning on doing. Now, I believe this starts with the 2005-2006 fiscal year.

Continued on Page 5. See "Conversation With"

City Watch Issues DayPlanner

Tuesday June 1**City Council (10a)**

***Disclosure of lobbyists to
Neighborhood Councils*

Education/Neighborhoods (2p)

***Conflict of Interest Code for
Neighborhood Councils*

Wednesday June 2**Housing (4p)**

***Displacement/relocation of
Section 8 & public housing tenants*

Tuesday June 8**LAUSD (1p)**

***Final EIR for New School
Construction Program*

Thursday June 17**Planning Department Briefing**

***Proposed citywide zoning code
amendment to provide detached,
townhome development in
commercial & multifamily zones*

Braude Center (10a)

City Hall (3p)

Thursday June 24**City Planning Commission
Public Hearing (10a)**

***Public comment on regulation of
Big Box Retail Superstores*

Constituent Service Center

6262 Van Nuys Blvd 1st Fl

□□□

NC WATCH

An Insider Look at Neighborhood Councils

NC's Must E-mail Letters

Clock Ticking: for NC's to Get in on DWP Partnership

Time is running out on Neighborhood Councils that want to benefit from, and participate in, the NC/DWP Partnership Agreement. An invitation to participate has been sent to NC leaders throughout the city. The deadline for Neighborhood Councils providing their Letter of Commitment is June 12.

The NC/DWP Partnership of Inclusion was an outgrowth of the Neighborhood Council effort to oppose the Department of Water and Power's proposed 18% rate increase. If the effort to forge a partnership succeeds, participating NC's will be able to participate in DWP planning and policy making, and the delivery of services to your neighborhood, in the future.

If you have not received your letter or need contact information, see the box next column. ■

CITY WATCH

ASSIGNMENT DESK

Stories in development.

Coming to a City Watch near you soon

- ◆ **Big Box Retail Superstores provide discounts and jobs: What's not to like?**
- ◆ **\$3.5 million. How are Neighborhood Councils spending all that public money?**
- ◆ **How does Tom LaBonge remember all those names?**
- ◆ **Neighborhood Councils: Who's making it? Who's not? See our list.**
- ◆ **Mayoral candidates ... and, candidate wannabe's. Where they stand on Neighborhood Councils.**
- ◆ **Business is finally making it to the NC table. Let us list the ways.**



IMPORTANT

NC/DWP Letter to NC Leaders

Neighborhood Council Leaders:

We need your help in developing a Partnership plan between the Neighborhood Councils throughout the city of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The LADWP officials are very interested in working with the Neighborhood Councils to develop a process that deals with the needs and roles of both entities.

How to Participate

- 1] Your Neighborhood Council should provide the NC/DWP Task force organizers a Letter of Commitment indicating your support of this effort.
- 2] Your Neighborhood Council should identify an official representative to the Task Force. [This individual can choose to participate directly in discussions with the DWP in the currently scheduled meetings but this is not a requirement.]

Objectives of the Partnership Agreement

- 1] Plan for the DWP to fulfill the City Charter requirement to inform NC's in sufficient time to allow NC's to review and advise before any City Council Committee action is taken.
- 2] Plan for educating the NC leadership and stakeholders on what the DWP responsibilities are and how they meet them.
- 3] Plan for monitoring the delivery of services by the DWP.
- 4] Plan for the participation of NC's in the planning and the policy making process.

NC/DWP Task Force Meeting Schedule

June 19, July 24, Aug. 21 and Sept 11

Meeting locations will be rotated between a Valley location and a downtown locations.

Contact Information

Send your Letter of Commitment to the following E-mail address: DWPTaskforce@NorthridgeWest.com or fax it to: 818.206.1162.

If you have questions, please call: 818.928.9001

We need your Neighborhood Council Letter of Commitment **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

The individual you designate as your council's official representative can be selected later but prior to the date of our first meeting on **June 19, 2004**. Also indicate if that representative will be attending the Task force meetings. Thank You.

NC/DWP Partnership Task Force

ViewPoints

Re: Inclusionary Zoning

(Neighborhood Councils continue to review an discuss Inclusionary Zoning. The Reyes-Garcetti mandatory Inclusionary Zoning motion is projected to come before the City Council in early August. Opinions are numerous and varied on this subject. City Watch will continue to provide you with some of those points of view, excerpted from letters, reports and statements submitted on Inclusionary Zoning.)

Voices from the 'Hood

One can't just wave a magic wand and make the housing problem go away. For the past 40 years or more we've been cramming more and more people into L.A. without the necessary transportation and infrastructure needed to support the population growth.

A final City proposal that required developers to help fund transportation/infrastructure improvements to adequately support new developments is long overdue. The current proposal has no such clause and is guilty of all the shortcomings that others have so eloquently put forward.

Developments in Mar Vista have been trying to simply cram more people into the neighborhood without consideration of city codes and transportation impact, and as much as we sincerely desire an answer to the housing shortage...THIS PROPOSAL IS NOT THE ANSWER!!!

-Ken Alpern
Mar Vista NC

...

Your analysis is RIGHT ON! YES! Affordable housing is needed. We need to find alternative incentives other than densification. It makes absolutely no sense to add even more density bonuses into areas that are already grid locked. We just had a new Community Plan imposed upon us that calls for surpassing the infrastructure capacity and provides inadequate open space and parks let alone the 300+ new police officers that were identified as needed by the Planning Department generated EIR.

-Denny Schneider
We Live Free

...

Personally speaking, I am against it. Forcing developers to set aside a certain percentage of units could drastically change single-family neighborhoods. Also, the measure does not appear on its face to provide any true likelihood of attracting police officers, teachers and firefighters, as most of them desire to live outside the County of Los Angeles in order to live in an environment that does not have high density issues. This does need further review, as this is just a knee jerk reaction to build more houses over a shorter period of time.

-Robert Cole, Chair
Empowerment Congress West Area-NDC

...

I personally support the IZ ordinance. Here in Venice, there is both support and opposition. Some of the opposition, interestingly, is from people who are supportive of affordable housing, but are opposed to giving developers any incentives such as height or density bonuses. And of course, there are some who simply do not want low-income housing of any kind in the community.

-Dennis Hathaway
GRVNC

Continued next column

Summer Issues-Continued from Page 2

Sunshine Canyon Landfill Ultimatum

Owners of the Sunshine Canyon Landfill have asked for an extension of their contract with the City to 2010. A no from the City could result in increased rates and a refusal to take city trash. (See story on Page 1.) The landfill owners issued a **June 15** deadline for response from the City and a **July 1** date for rate increases.

NC/DWP Partnership Agreement

On March 20, the Department of Water and Power and representatives from Neighborhood Councils signed a Letter of Intent, agreeing to meet and try to form a partnership agreement that would help ensure the timely distribution of information to NC's, an education program for NC's and stakeholders and a system whereby NC's are involved in planning and policy and the delivery of services. The first of those meetings is scheduled for **June 19**. □

Continued from previous column

Voices from the City

(City Council members Tony Cardenas, Dennis Zine, Wendy Greuel and Alex Padilla to the Southland Regional Association of Realtors in Van Nuys on May 24, 2004 As reported by Sunland-Tujunga NC Board member, Nina Royal.)

Tony Cardenas - Has not made up his mind. Wants to make sure that builders don't put up good projects in a more favored part of town and fill their quota for less expensive units in the North Valley . He believes there is a need for some type of program of this nature but has to be a good fit. Note Cardenas is on the Planning and Land Use Committee.

Dennis Zine – Is not sure he is for the plan, but feels some plan is definitely needed. He feels that police, teachers and public service employees will be able to afford the homes. He says there is a citizen organization in L.A. that is pushing Inclusionary Zoning.

Wendy Greuel – Says it will abolish the community and specific plans and she is very concerned for all the people that worked so hard putting them together. (There was no denial from the other Council members on this fact.) No zoning will be exempt.

Alex Padilla - Is definitely for it. However, he expressed his desire that everyone become involved and attend the hearings because something is going to be put in place within the next 90 days and we should attend the meetings to give our input, or we will be left out in the cold. □

Landfill Threatens City-Continued from Page 1

Neighborhood Councils in the Northwest Valley, already weary of fighting the permits for the City side of the landfill, read that as a gun-to-the-head issue. "BFI just turned what arguably was a local issue," says Jim Alger, "into a citywide issue of urgency."

"Are we willing to stand up and draw a line in the sand or will we allow these gun-to-the-head politics to continue," Alger asks in his letter to Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils. Alger is the NC activist who steered the opposition to the Department of Water and Power 18% rate increase.

Resolution Coming

Alger says that the Granada Hills North NC is about to pass a resolution requesting help from other Neighborhood Councils and he aims to see that they get it. Not unlike the successful DWP rate increase opposition effort, he is asking Councils to agendize the issue and provide support for what he sees as another affront that affects all the City's neighborhoods. "It's a way of sending a message that the people of Los Angeles will not be bullied into signing a contract we have already rejected."

If it follows the DWP model, the NC process will then work its way through committees, City Council offices and the City Council. Alger says he has already started fly-overs of the landfill to monitor Sunshine Canyon operations and "make sure they are complying with permits and laws."

Ready for Another Battle

Are Neighborhood Councils up to yet another citywide battle? "Every time we think we have measured our capacity to meet a challenge, we look up and we're reminded that that capacity may very well be limitless," answers Alger.

Despite his optimism, the question remains: Are the city's Neighborhood Councils drained from the DWP experience or are they prepared to handle an endless string of citywide confrontations? With Inclusionary Zoning, the LA Airport expansion, the NC/DWP Partnership Agreement and other issues looming, is there room on the NC plate for more? The response to that question could turn out to be the most significant response of all. ■

Conversation With-Continued from Page 2

City Watch: Does that mean that after looking at the Service Plan, the council can actually have a part in determining which streets get paved or perhaps that their sidewalks should take precedent over streets?

Waters: That input should have happened before the here's-what-we're-going-to-do plan is developed and presented.

City Watch: Let's stay with this, so I'm clear. Take the 2005-2006 plan. Will councils have a say in where the DPW money is going to go?

Waters: Suppose they say they have 100 streets they're going to do. It's up to us to decide if these are the streets we want. The objective is that at the end of the 90 days, the Neighborhood Council will have adopted the plan. They will say, "Yep, this is what we want to have done."

City Watch: In LA, unlike most other large cities, are trash collection fees don't come close to covering the cost of the service. Suppose NC's decided that it would be a good thing if trash fees actually covered the costs. Is there really an opportunity for councils to influence that change?

Waters: Through this framework, and today, I would say no. That was not something we looked at as part of this. But, I can certainly see it as something it would grow into. Because we're going to have to learn this. We're going to have to learn how to work with each other.

Continued on Page 6. See "Conversation With"

**City
Hall:
We've
Gotcha
Covered !!**

**Make
Sure
You're
on
the
City
Watch
Network**

*Send your name and
e-address to:*

sirken323@aol.com

Perspective-Continued from Page 1

By far the most obstructive of the reasons is what DONE General Manager, Greg Nelson, calls "a control fight." Working together to get certified is one thing, but when it comes down to who gets to be in charge, that's another. The political and cultural turf wars flush to the surface. Fears that one group will get control of the council become divisive. Or, those in control are finding ways to keep "them" out.

Organizers become paternal. It's the "I've worked at putting this group together, therefore it's only right that I get to be on the board" syndrome. Some believe so much in that "right" they don't bother campaigning and are shocked when they're on the short end of the vote.

Lack of Desire

As for the councils that have yet to hold an election, or are taking forever to hold their second, Nelson blames it on lack of desire. "They're happy being self-appointed leaders," he says. Some fear having the status quo disrupted. Some fear they won't be reelected.

Some of election snafus are the result of folks that are simply not up to the task. They are ignorant of the process and haven't the vaguest idea of how to translate the promise of the Charter or their bylaws into an open and fair ... and legal ..election. With the exception of the Brown Act, very little else councils do involve State law and outside regulations, as do elections. Running an election requires NC's to rise to a level of accountability and openness not found in the experience history of some council organizers.

Some Blame for DONE

And, DONE is not without some blame. The lack of clear election guidelines and the wavering policy decisions of the early months contributed to some of the election glitches. There is some question about the enforcement abilities or desire of the Board, as well. How else can you explain allowing a certified council to go nearly two years without holding its first election? As with the Neighborhood Council's election decisions, the Board's first consideration ought to be the interest of the stakeholders.

Holding a Neighborhood Council election ought to be simple. And, it would be if it weren't for the folks who hold them. As Nelson points out, "Central San Pedro's election rules are one page and their bylaws are three pages. It's not complicated if you're willing to be inclusive. It gets complicated, and often illegal, when your trying to ensure that "they" don't vote so your folks can be in power."

The problem is that what Nelson is talking about is the human condition. And, no amount of election procedures or guidelines will likely do much to change it.



Conversation With-Continued from Page 5

City Watch: How do City Council offices come into the mix?

Waters: They come into it at three points. The can input initially when the Department is putting together their plan. They will have an opportunity to influence what the Neighborhood Councils want to do. And, the third piece is that once NC's adopt the plan and send it back to DPW with their marching orders, who has the real authority is still the City Council. That doesn't change.

City Watch: What response are you getting so far from the City Council offices related to the four MOU Neighborhood Councils?

Waters: We have three council people, plus the Mayor. Before we signed the agreement I ran it up the flag pole with all four. All of them came back saying, "go for it."

City Watch: And, so far, how's the relationship going with Public Works?

Waters: It couldn't be better. They're learning. We're learning. We're all working together on it. There's a major collaboration taking place.

Cont. from previous column

City Watch: Since the agreement, how often do the NC's and DPW meet?

Waters: That was not actually detailed in the agreement. We've had meetings but they have been ramp-up meetings as opposed to on-going meetings.

City Watch: O.K. So four of you have a deal with Public Works. What does this actually mean to the rest of the LA Neighborhood Council world?

Waters: The people at the Department that I have talked to want to take this citywide as soon as they can. They see it as a more efficient and preferable way to do they work.

City Watch: Do you have a guestimate on when the next group of councils ... or the rest of the councils ... might be added to the package?

Waters: No. The plan is that these Service Plans (which are designed for specific councils) will come in at the rate of one a month. Each one, because we're all learning, will be more comprehensive than the last. It was serendipitous but, the fact that the Department is going to have four bites at this apple is a good thing. They will have four goes at this. And, if number four is a good "saleable" product, then off we go. Remember, this is a pilot program. The objective is to get something that is going to work citywide. When this thing is fully ramped up, these Service Plans will be coming out at the rate of two a week.

City Watch: Thank you, Paul.

Waters: My pleasure.

(Paul Waters is the Secretary of the Studio City Neighborhood Council Board of Directors. He was the motivating force behind the development of the NC/DPW Pilot Project and the crafting of the Memorandum of Understanding.)



