

## Special Advance

# CITY WATCH

*An Insider Look At City Hall*

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**CITY WATCH**  
The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

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CITY WATCH is published to promote grassroots civic engagement through information and ideas.

CITY WATCH is published electronically on Tuesday of every other week. Share it with your Neighborhood Council and other activists.

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## CITY WATCH

# The Experiment is Over: Have an NC Thanksgiving

By Ken Draper

Tell Dennis Zine, the experiment is over. Janice Hahn was right! Neighborhood empowerment has taken. Tell the naysayers to find another cause for their negative rants and their doom-shrouded forecasts. Neighborhood Councils are here to stay. The revolution has passed the point of not return.

Next month will mark three years since LA's first NC was certified. There are now 83. This February, City Watch and the Citywide Alliance and KCBS ... and Neighborhood Councils from all across Los Angeles ... will host the campaign's two most important mayoral debates.

### **Neighborhoods Have Found Their voice**

Even as we confront the turkey and dressing leftovers, 40-plus Councils are sitting with the City's largest agency, the LA Department of Water and Power, crafting an agreement that will ensure that the promises of the City Charter are kept. Neighborhood Council opposition put the brakes on an 18% water rate increase, slowed the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance and helped pass a Newsrack Ordinance that limits their number and controls their appearance. The neighborhoods have found their voice. This genie will not go back in the bottle.

### **Proof**

The real proof, however, is in the Councils themselves. The 35 to 40 established NC's, now rooted in their communities, tending to community business and providing a neighborhood voice at City Hall. The numbers may actually be higher. The roots and establishment may still be shallow, but NC's are a presence and they are here to stay. If the City withdrew it's funding, if DONE were to disappear tomorrow, there is today a solid core of Neighborhood Councils that would survive and continue to provide the voice that is reshaping the way the city government does business. Neighborhood Councils are, and will remain, a part of the City's political landscape.

There is not now, and there will never be, a citywide system with every Council running on all cylinders. This is grassroots democracy. Don't confuse organizational perfection with effectiveness or accomplishment. On that score, democracy ain't perfect. And, oft-times, it ain't pretty. If you don't believe that, I suggest you review the history of our own City Hall.

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### **Next City Watch: November 30**

✓ HRC Rules Against Grassroots Venice: What's Next?

✓ Can NC's Deliver the Voters?

✓ Handicapping the Mayoral Race

✓ Latest Blog Gossip

## **\*The Great Mayoral Debates\***

*Featuring LA's Neighborhood Councils*

**CITY WATCH, the Citywide Alliance, KCBS/KCAL ...and, NC's across the City, will present the most timely and important mayoral debates of the 2005 City Election.**

● **February 7 at 8 pm**

● **February 28 at 6:30 pm**

**Televised LIVE from CBS Television City**

- **All questions provided by Neighborhood Councils**
- **All questions asked by Neighborhood Councils**
- **All attendees from Neighborhood Councils**

*To find out how your Neighborhood Council can participate and get more details on the debates: watch for the next City Watch, watch for special alerts on the City Watch Network, visit [www.allncs.org](http://www.allncs.org) or forward your e-address to Debate at [LACityWatch@aol.com](mailto:LACityWatch@aol.com).*

### **Experiment-cont**

#### **Quorums**

Yes, we know, some NC's have had trouble with quorums. But, so do the City's committees and commissions. Last December, the City Council turned the lights out early because it couldn't locate a quorum. Why single out NC's?

#### **Funding Decisions**

One of the critics' favorite gripes is the choices NC's make for spending the tax-payer's money (i.e. the \$50,000 City funding for certified Councils). First of all, Neighborhood Councils are the tax-payers. Second, as Laura Chick's audits and Wendy Greuel's Efficiency Committee keep demonstrating, the City is hardly a model for how to handle the tax-payer's money. Remember too, the city of San Diego has been on the edge of bankruptcy for some time now. How could NC's do any worse?

The Charter mandate was not about perfection or Neighborhood Councils without problems. It was about regular people having a voice in their own government. About changing the way the City does business. About transparency and the right to be informed in a timely fashion. About monitoring the delivery of city services. About grassroots empowerment and civic engagement.

The empowerment genie is out of the bottle. An impressive number of Neighborhood Councils have figured out how to give a voice to their communities, even if they haven't gotten comfortable yet with the Brown Act or don't manage a quorum at every committee meeting. They have learned how to make a difference. Even if somewhat fluid, that core of empowered Neighborhood Councils is not going away. The genie cannot be massaged or intimidated back into the bottle. Have a happy NC Thanksgiving! ■

### **Experiment is Over-Cont from Page 1.**

Most often, the misperception of how well Neighborhood Councils are doing is the result of expectations and comparisons that are not only unrealistic, but downright wrong.

#### **Elections**

We keep hearing about NC's that encounter election problems. Hello! Does the name Florida ring a bell? San Diego still has not finalized its November 2 mayor's election. At least three parties have filed challenges ... threatened to sue ... as they try to sort it out. A man on an Orange County ballot never campaigned and couldn't be found after he won. Why are we expecting perfection from Neighborhood Councils?

#### **Bylaws**

Some NC's have had bylaws issues. Governments, at all levels, are regularly sued by attorneys and reproached by courts for violating their constitutions. Congress has tried to enact laws that were ruled unconstitutional. Why are NC's held to a higher standard?

#### **Brown Act**

Neighborhood Councils spend an inordinate amount of time trying to negotiate the Brown Act maze. Some have most certainly violated the Brown Act. But then again, so have the city of Beverly Hills and the County's Board of Supervisors. Why expect more of NC's?

**Continued next column**