

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

April 5, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 7

CITY WATCH

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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.

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We welcome your comments

Analysis

Real Meaning of DWP Set Back: 'There's a New NC World in LA'

By Ken Draper

Last week the City Council put the brakes on the Department of Water and Power's rate hike express and in the process handed Neighborhood Councils a certificate of credibility. They unanimously agreed to require that all DWP requests for rate increases be subject to independent financial analysis and that NC's have "ample opportunity to review these reports and submit their comments" before the request hits the Council chambers.

The action was a major score for Neighborhood Councils and their effort to get one of the City's most independent and arrogant agencies to back off of their 18% rate increase campaign and shine some light on the motives and math behind the request. Almost 60% of the elected NC boards voted to oppose the increase (39 of the 40 that agendized the issue), principally because they felt the Water Department wasn't being straight with them. They coalesced behind Northridge activist, Jim Alger, and got the 18% increase put on hold.

The real measure of how loudly the Neighborhood Councils had rung the empowerment bell came from Councilman Greig Smith, the maker of the motion. "Water and Power is a very powerful agency," Smith told the Council, "There's a new world in Los Angeles and it includes Neighborhood Councils."

Getting the 18% increase shelved was a major, but short-term, victory for Neighborhood Councils. More significant was the proof that empowerment is taking and the establishment a Neighborhood Council chair at the City's table.

Continued on Page 7. See "DWP Set Back"

Perspectives

Saving Departments, Taxes and Rock & Roll

By Ken Draper

Just Thinking Out Loud:

Some NC elections are drawing more voters than citywide elections in the same area. How relevant are Neighborhood Councils?

Antonio Villaraigosa says we still bowl in America but now we bowl alone.

Why is everyone so afraid of the "T" word? It is my sense that most folks would be willing to pay for things they really wanted from the City, if they could be guaranteed that their dollars would actually be used for the things they wanted. That's one of the reasons the LA Sheriff is finding so much support for his ½ Cent Public Safety sales tax. A safe city and safe sidewalks are the two most wanted items on the public's wish list.

The preamble to the new LA City Charter was written by a Belmont High School student.

Continued on Page 5. See "Perspectives"

Insight**Mayor's #1 Battle: Public Perception**

By Mark Siegel

For the past two years I have been a loyal staff member of Mayor Jim Hahn's administration. The tour provided some insight into how the city works and the Mayor both work.

My first job was organizing Free Cash for College day. Then, last July, it was to staff LA STAT, a program that monitors performance of the city service departments. Not the inner circle, I agree, but I did offer an opportunity to see the Mayor's office at work up close and personal.

Confrontation Not Mayor's Style

By and large, the city and its departments do commendable work. The city workforce is achieving levels of productivity and efficiency, in many cases higher, than other big cities around the country. To a large part that is due to Mayor, and his management style. Unlike his predecessor, Hahn believes in collaborating with the department managers, neighborhood councils, workers and the consumers of the services. Confrontation is not his style of management and it works for him.

The Mayor's goals are reasonably well known: expanding the Police Department to make Los Angeles the safest big city in America; modernizing the airport, while meeting the concerns of neighboring communities; promoting neighborhood empowerment through DONE and neighborhood councils; and, opening up the budget process and decision making to the public.

Continued on Page 7. See "Perception"

City Watch Conversation**Joel Wachs: What Do You Think of Us Now?**

(The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners certified the first Los Angeles Neighborhood Council a little over two years ago. Neighborhood Councils are still basking in the glow of their success with the DWP rate increase issue (see Page 1). The office of former Los Angeles City Councilman, Joel Wachs, was the moving force behind the creation of LA Neighborhood Councils. DONE General Manager, Greg Nelson, worked for Wachs and gave birth to the NC idea. It seems like an appropriate time to sit down and measure the current status of Neighborhood Councils against their early vision.)

City Watch: I first became aware of the Neighborhood Council concept in the late '90's when I received some material from former LA Councilman Joel Wachs.

Greg Nelson: That was actually late in the game. I have on the DONE website a part of the statement he made in October 1992 when he announced he was going to run for Mayor. In that statement was his first announcement of his dream for Neighborhood Councils. He decided to make that the theme for his election.

Part of Joel Wachs statement, October 5, 1992: "It will take leadership which reaches down to the roots of our city and shares power with the people who live here. We need a leader who will listen to people. We need a leader who will bring out the best in people. We need a leader who will unite Angelinos and rebuild our city from the bottom up. In essence, we need a leader who will turn Los Angeles into a Family of Neighborhoods, in which everyone participates and everyone takes pride."

Continued on Page 8. See "Conversation"

Quotables

"The DWP has consistently circumvented the Neighborhood Councils and is attempting to do so with fear, half-truths and flat-out lies."

**-Jim Alger, Activist
DWP Rate Hike Opposition**

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"Angelinos can handle the truth. What they can't handle is people not telling the truth."

**-Councilman Tony Cardenas
Sixth District**

◆◆◆

"There's a new world in Los Angeles, and it includes Neighborhood Councils."

**-Councilman Greig Smith
Twelfth District**

◆◆◆

"When Neighborhood Councils believe that something's wrong in the City, they should organize ... and, they have and they have spoken clearly."

**-Councilman
Antonio Villaraigosa
Fourteenth District**

◆◆◆

"The only people you have sitting in front of you are lobbyists and special interests. You've never had a consistent voice from the public."

**-Brady Westwater
Downtown LA NC**

Tracking the Issues (I-Trac)**Too Long at the Bar, Lose Your Car**

Drive drunk and lose your car. That's what Councilman Greig Smith is after. Citing a 24% increase in DUI-related crashes in his 12th District, Smith has introduced legislation that would permit the seizure and auction of any vehicle involved in a DUI offence. "This will absolutely save lives," he says.

The motion is supported by City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, LAPD Chief William Bratton and Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

The American Civil Liberties Union has voice concerns about seizing the car of someone not yet convicted, but Delgadillo says that car seizures are unique because the vehicle is in fact the instrumental in the commission of the crime."

Neighbors Teed Off

Students and neighbors are complaining about errant golf balls peppering classroom buildings and the adjacent day-care center from the recently opened state-of-the-art driving range on Los Angeles City College property.

The range was the focus of controversy from the outset of construction. Students wanted the space for parking and neighbors ... and some city officials ... complained about the 27 fence supports that jut 16 stories into the air, calling the range an eyesore.

City Council approved an Eric Garcetti motion last week that would immediately and permanently close the new driving range.

Issues to Watch

- 04-579 Personnel Department to report in 60 days on establishing a prescription drug bulk purchasing consortium to help reduce the cost of prescription drugs.
- 04-555 Requesting 101 Corridor Task Force to present their traffic mitigation recommendations.
- 02-1619 Settlement discussion in the case entitled Telemundo of Los Angeles, Inc., et al. v. City of Los Angeles and Council President Alex Padilla
- 03-1514 City Attorney report on NC office space leasing.
- 03-2213 Report from Housing Department on apartment owners renting parking spaces to the general public instead of tenants.

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Learn how to send Impact Statements !!

- >Visit the **DONE** website
- >Go to **Newsroom**
- >Locate **Nov 25, 2003 Newsletter**

**City Watch
DayPlanner****Wednesday April 7**

- Audits & Efficiency (8:35a)**
 >Cost Saving Ideas from City Unions
 >Merging public safety officers
 >Reduction of toll-free phone #'s

City Council (10a)
 Scottish Rite Temple CUP
 City childcare

Friday April 9

City Council in Recess

Tuesday April 27

BONC (6:30p)
 NC's that have not held elections
 after being certified for 8 months

Saturday May 22

**Congress of Neighborhoods
 (8:30a)**
 LA Convention Center

...

**City Watch
Publishing
Dates**

April 19, 2004
 May 3, 2004
 May 17, 2004
 May 31, 2004

NC WATCH

Page 4

Council in Crisis

WCKNC Cancels Election Just Hours Before Polls Are to Open

By Ken Draper

Facing the threat of at least two challenges and a fair amount of confusion, the Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council canceled their first general election just hours before the polls were scheduled to open. At a contentious and divided emergency meeting last Monday, the interim board ignored the advice of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and voted 8-6 (three abstentions) to shelve the election and regroup.

Among the issues facing the board: 1) The handling of more than 3,000 absentee ballots; 2) charges that all of the election materials were not translated properly; 3) Ineffective outreach to the Latino community; 4) arguments about perceived inappropriate slate voting and voter influence; and, 5) the threat of two serious challenges to the election.

Claiming ineffective and insufficient outreach to the Latino community, who make up 59% of the WCKNC stakeholder population, interim board member and MALDEF representative, Paul Vizcaino, told the board, "I guarantee this election will be challenged."

Continued on Page 6. See "Election"

NC/DWP Partnership of Inclusion

How Your NC Can & Should Participate

The Department of Water and Power has agreed to meet with Neighborhood Council representatives and craft a Partnership of Inclusion. This will be an agreement that will allow Councils to participate in policy planning and the delivery of services.

Every Neighborhood Council, with an elected board, will be invited to participate on the Partnership Committee.

Every participating Council will be represented on the Advisory Committee and represent the interests of their neighborhood, and the City.

The DWP has signed a Letter of Intent, with the NC Steering Committee, guaranteeing that they will meet to craft the Partnership of Inclusion. As agreed to, those meetings will begin in the next few weeks.

The officers of Neighborhood Councils with elected boards, will receive a letter the week of April 12 (via e-mail and post) explaining the goals of the project and how and why you should participate. You will be asked to elect/select an official representative for your council and given the deadlines for participation.

This is an historic and precedent-setting opportunity for Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils. You will want your Neighborhood Council to be represented. Watch for your letter and respond promptly.

If you have questions, or do not receive your letter by April 19 contact Rusty Millar at larunner1@earthlink.net or 323.662.3324.

...

City Watch NC DayPlanner

Wednesday April 7

Silver Lake NC (7p)

Guidelines for developers

Motion: Secty will note late arrivals

Saturday April 10

United Neighborhoods of the Historic NC

(11a – 4p)

*One Year Anniversary
Celebration*

Wed April 14

STNC Council Meeting (7p)

Saturday April 17

MCKNC Interim Board (10a)

Election Plan

...

**You
Can
Read
or**

Download

CITY WATCH

www.alncs.org

www.lacityneighborhoods.com

www.park2parkla.com

www.laissuesaction.org

**Greig Smith Motion
Requiring DWP Financial Analysis & NC Input
3-30-04**

The subject of the DWP rate hikes have drawn much attention and caused controversy in the past several months, particularly from neighborhood groups.

One of the many areas of concern has been the need for such increases and the participation of the citizenry in the process of determining them. The DWP has been asked to justify the need for such increases, as well as provide access to information on how the amount of the increase was determined.

It is incumbent upon the City to provide verifiable economic accountability and a transparent process in these matters. The public trust is not to be taken lightly, especially when rate increases are involved. The public must have the utmost confidence that every dollar spent is a necessary one and that every increase is justified.

I THEREFORE MOVE that any request for rate increase by the Department of Water and Power be subject to an independent financial review and analysis to determine if an increase is justified, and if so, at what amount.

I FURTHER MOVE that all Neighborhood Councils have ample opportunity to review these independent reports and submit their comment before the matter comes before the full Council.

Greig Smith
Councilmember, Twelfth District

Perspectives-Continued from Page 1

Even though their legal options will likely run out, don't you find yourself pulling for the urban farmers who tend the 14 acres at 41st and Alameda?

"There's a distrust for government," Wendy Greuel told her colleagues, "and a distrust of many of us here in these Council chambers." That's the answer to the questions: Why don't people vote? Why don't people get involved?

How can Neighborhood Councils be truly independent when they keep looking to the DONE to solve their problems? That includes running their elections for them.

One of the reasons Jim Alger and friends had so much success with their citywide rate hike issue: More walk than talk! Sometimes the answer is, just rock and roll.

Saving departments 101: It is fiscally irresponsible and weakens your case when you demand the City keep a program or department in the budget without recommending a corresponding cut. The number of dollars available is finite.

Don't downplay advisory bodies, Neither Cesar Chavez or Martin Luther King were elected officials. Their work was advisory also. ■

CITY WATCH

Future Assignments

- ◆ Who Doesn't Like Wal-Mart?
- ◆ New Election Procedures: Will They Help?
- ◆ The 2004-2005 Budget: What's Left?

Stories on the City Watch Assignment Board

The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

**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

Election-Continued from Page 4

With his Statement of Challenge in hand, Yohngsohk Choe, one of the NC's founding members, argued that absentee ballots and election procedures were not made available in three languages, as the WCKNC Election Procedures promise. He also claimed "violations have occurred in the handling of absentee ballots."

The League of Women Voter's representative told the gathering that "no illegality had occurred" and a letter from DONE General Manager, Greg Nelson, noted, "The election procedures that you developed do not appear to have been violated, and the spirited campaigning that has taken place is a testament to the civic engagement that everyone had hoped would be increased by Neighborhood Councils."

Spirited Campaigning

In fact, it was the "spirited" campaigning, especially on the part of the Korean-American community that prompted some of the hotter moments in the debate. The Asian community makes up 29% of the councils stakeholders and generated the largest, most organized and most expensive campaigns in the community. Their effort included full-page newspaper ads, radio advertising and phone banks. Some claimed they also promised assistance with absentee ballots and, according to Choe, the fact that the names on the ballots had not been translated into Korean, provided an unfair advantage.

The Senior Project Coordinator from DONE, Michele Cuevas, said that her department had spent more on this election than for any other council, in part because of the need to hire temp staff to do the work, in lieu of any volunteer support from MWKNC. In his letter to the group, Nelson said, "Our department had expected that your Neighborhood Council would have provided enough volunteers to make the election process run smoothly, as other Neighborhood Councils have done. It did not. As a result, our department ... (had to) hire over 30 temporary workers to ensure that you are able to have an election." Nelson pleaded, "I urge you in the strongest possible way to allow the election to continue."

Conflict of Interest?

Despite DONE's efforts, there were some on the board who blamed the department for their dilemma, in particular, the handling of the absentee ballots (DONE extended the absentee voting period by a week), for approving only partially translated absentee ballots and for some confusion about a conflict ... or, at least a perceived conflict of interest ... with members of the board both running as candidates and making decisions on election policy.

Interim WCKNC President, Gary Russell, said he was upset about not being told about the conflict issue and apologized to the board for calling the emergency meeting.

Choe said he is "quite happy" with the result of the vote because a delay will help "ensure a fair election."

Funding May Not Be Available

No one seemed particularly concerned with the possibility that DONE, affected by the City's budget crisis, might not have funding for another election or with any credibility damage the council might suffer as the result of the last-minute cancellation. Or, for that matter, with the fact that the motion was for cancellation instead of postponement.

WCKNC has the largest stakeholder population in the city. In excess of 100,000. It has a heavily diverse cultural makeup. Elections for a council of this size and diversity can be costly and complicated.

The interim board has scheduled a meeting for April 17 (10 a.m.) to assess the damage and consider the question, "whither from here?" ... and, how are we going to pay for it. ■

City Watch On-Line Address Book

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- 🔗 DONE Website/links-
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www.lacity.org

CITY WATCH

THE
E-NEWSLETTER
FOR
LA'S NC'S

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Bi-Weekly

DWP Set Back-Continued from Page 1

As recently as a month ago, City Council approval of the increase was considered a done deal. Alger and his NC troops were told they might be able to negotiate a perfunctory meeting with the Water Department, but because of the fear of a bond rating downgrade, DWP had the Council votes. Even Councilwoman Hahn, in late February, told DWP CEO Gerald Gewe, "You've made your case to me but you haven't convinced the Neighborhood Councils." Both Hahn and Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski voted to approve the DWP proposal and send it on to Council. Two other committees waived the matter without any hearing.

Awakened Coalition

But the stir they caused at the Commerce and Energy Committee had awakened the fledgling NC coalition and there was no putting the empowerment genie back in the bottle. Few things generate passion like being ignored. Relevance is second only to survival among basic political drives. Alger and company now had a cause even more powerful than the increase itself. They set about energizing the councils, negotiated a dramatic and poignant meeting with Gewe and the DWP, got them to sign off on a letter of intent to create a partnership of inclusion with NC's, began to lobby City Council offices in earnest and organized a protest march, to provide some additional leverage. "I've been following your activities," Councilman Eric Garcetti told the Neighborhood Councils, "and, it been remarkable to see the city come together."

• See complete text of Councilman Greig Smith's Motion on Page 4.

• How can your Neighborhood Council participate in the DWP/NC Partnership process and make sure my neighborhood is represented? See City Watch Page 4.

For some months now, Neighborhood Councils have been listening to critics question their relevance and wonder if they would ever learn how to project their collective voice into the process. March 30 was unofficial Neighborhood Council day at City Hall. The result of councils across the city, already successful at the local level, figuring out how to gel as one citywide voice.

Not Happy Being Ignored

Alger, and Sliver Lake's Rusty Millar, Granada Hills North's Kim Thompson, Westside's Kevin Singer and Downtown's Brady Westwater brought the councils face to face with one of the City's most powerful agencies. They organized the lobbying effort and crafted a plan for taking their "we-will-not-be-ignored" case to committees and City Council. Even conservative Chair, Bernard Parks, agreed to return the DWP matter to a Budget Committee agenda.

"This is an example of what we expect from Neighborhood Councils," Antonio Villaraigosa told his colleagues, "When (Neighborhood Councils) believe that something is wrong ... that we need to change something, they should organize. And, they have done that and they have spoken clearly."

Continued on Page 8. See "DWP Set Back"

Perception-Continued from Page 2

Under his watch, Chief Bratton appears to have the short-handed LAPD on the improve, Neighborhood Councils now have some traction, regional planning departments and regional "city halls" are in place, the 311 System has been implemented and the Teamwork LA and LA STAT programs are in place.

So, with this kind of record going for him, one would think that the Mayor would be getting a free pass to his second term.

Raining on the Mayor

Into every life, the proverb goes, a little rain must fall, and this holds true for the current administration. Mayor Hahn has lately seemed to be on the wrong side of public perception on some key issues and it has him and his staff scrambling.

The so-called "pay to play" investigations, for example, into the activities and policies of the Airport Commission and the DWP commission are more likely a result of overly zealous fundraisers and supporters, who may or may not have committed a crime, there's no talk of the Mayor being personally involved. Still it casts a pall, giving the perception that those around the Mayor, if not the Mayor himself, are not playing by the rules. This gives encouragement to those thinking of taking him on.

Hahn's Failure

The failure of Hahn to use his numerous accomplishments to recast his image as an action figure, gives one the impression that he may be politically weak. The absence of good news gives greater space for the negative to take hold.

Another point of concern is the seemingly large numbers of staff members leaving the Mayor's office for jobs in other political offices and the private sector. While it is not all that unusual for the staff revolving door to spin, many I've talked to think it is a case of the rats jumping from sinking ship.

One Year to Go

It is exactly one year to the Mayoral election and, as the season approaches, it is not known how stiff challenges to Hahn will be. State Senator Richard Alarcon has thrown his hat into the ring, but has reportedly been told by Labor that they are backing Hahn this time. Labor was a key player in Villaraigosa's effort three years ago. Councilman Parks is reportedly thinking about running and so is former Assembly Speaker Bob Hertzberg. All three of these candidates come out of voting bases that Hahn has historically won.

The best defense is a good offence. Hahn needs to spend some time in the community, meeting with Neighborhood Councils and other local organizations. He needs to give neighborhoods the sense that he is there for them, in their communities. If Hahn can't get his message out through the media, the alternative is hand-to-hand. With Neighborhood Councils the infrastructure is in place, use it. ■

Conversation-Continued from Page 2

City Watch: Where did the idea come from?

Greg Nelson: It was early 1992, before the Rodney King riots, and I was riding my mountain bike up a mountain. I got to the top and was sitting there under a tree. It was so quiet and I started thinking about things. I thought about the Jimmy Carter administration. There was so much money flowing out of Washington at that point. As a city, we were hiring people, building senior centers and community building like crazy. Then when Carter lost, the money dried up but the social problems were still there. So the question became, how in the world do we address social problems without the dollars. The answer then ... after the pinecone hit me on the head ...was that we have to get people more involved in helping themselves. Taking care of and improving their neighborhoods themselves. And holding their elected officials more accountable. The only way to do that was if people had a meaningful role. So, I developed this idea of Neighborhood Councils.

City Watch: And from there ...

Greg Nelson: Then I went to the Library and found articles by both conservatives and liberals who had written about this whole idea of neighborhood empowerment and participatory democracy. To shorten the story, I began to get excited about the concept and started writing memos to Joel. When he decided to run for Mayor we reviewed the idea and he really liked it. He literally jumped up out of his chair and say, "Yes. That's the answer." And, he made it the theme of his mayoral campaign.

City Watch: So Joel got it right away?

Greg Nelson: Yeah. He said, "We can have four neighborhood congresses a year." I said, "that's a little much, but we'll go with that for now."

City Watch: I know that there was a motion submitted to the Council in the mid-'90's and I know you drafted the language for the Neighborhood Council portion of the Charter. Who were the early supporters on the City Council?

Greg Nelson: Everybody had a different concept, a different idea of what it would be. In fact, people who are disappointed with anything that's happening now are probably disappointed because they don't think it's meeting their own expectations.

City Watch: How does the current Neighborhood Council system compare to the vision you and Joel had back in 1992?

Greg Nelson: Mostly it's the State laws. All those State laws.

City Watch: When you started you didn't think of Councils as City agencies?

Greg Nelson: No, I was trying to get the word "independent" ... as an adjective, into the charter and the City Attorney said it was too vague. It finally made its way back in the plan.

City Watch: Dennis Zine and Janice Hahn said recently that they "never imagined there would be problems like this." What we have is 81 unique and separate little democracies. How could having problems be such a surprise?

Greg Nelson: Who knows what people were thinking when the Charter was being formed. But, how well we're doing depends on whose expectations we're measuring against.

City Watch: Let me wrap up with a couple of questions for Joel. How do you think the 2004 Neighborhood Councils doing?

Joel Wachs: From what I understand they're off to a slow but good start. Their potential, however, is enormous and I only hope the Mayor and Council will give them the resources and the power they need to achieve it.

Continued next column

City Watch: Neighborhood Councils won a major victory last week in City Council when they helped detour the DWP rate increase. So, maybe the start isn't so slow.

Joel Wachs: Thank you for that. As we imagined, once started, the Neighborhood Councils will assume more and more power on their own. But to fully realize their potential, there must be a requirement that before the City can act on issues of citywide significance (such as the proposed rate increase), the Councils MUST be given an opportunity to study the proposal and voice their opinions.

City Watch: Thank you Greg Nelson. Thank you Joel Wachs. For both the conversation and the Neighborhood Council idea. *(For an historical record of the birth and development of the Neighborhood Council Concept, visit the DONE website [www.lacityneighborhoods.com] and click on Reference Library. □*

DWP Set Back-Cont from page 7

So, the deeper meaning of this NC achievement will be the long-term effects it will have. The lessons learned and the experience gained. The precedent-setting Letter of Intent. The confidence building that comes from walking the walk vs. talking the talk.

As Janice Hahn said of March 30, "It's a great day when everyone joins the chorus about Neighborhood Councils. What this does is give average people in this city a strong voice."

But Garcetti summed up the real meaning: "For those who have been cynical about Neighborhood Councils (saying) they were only going to be a voice against things, today you are a voice asking for information so you can be for something."

Now, maybe Neighborhood Councils are prepared to move beyond empowerment and into their Charter-mandated role of serious advisors. □

