

CITY WATCH

An Insider Look At City Hall

April 19, 2004 Volume 2 Issue 8

CITY WATCH

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CITY WATCH

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

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We welcome your comments

One Thing You Can't Cut from the City Budget: Politics

By Mark Siegel

By the time you read this story the city budget will probably be public and budget politics the will be in full swing. The word in the halls, has over 400 positions being cut, although not all of them are currently filled. Some layoffs, and perhaps furloughs are expected.

The city budgeting process has undergone some changes this year. According to Deputy Mayor Doane Liu, the city now funds services, not departments.

As we start this political rite of Spring, it is important to understand the basic motivations of the players. Each has his or her personal motivations, in addition to doing what is best for the City.

Mayor's 2004-2005 Budget: What's In? What's Out? (See Page 6.)

One of the major players, of course, is Mayor Hahn and his budget team, headed by Julia Kirwan. City Hall observers generally feel that last year, the Mayor's office blew it when the Mayor was unable to pass his centerpiece, the addition of 300 new officers for the police department.

Kirwan, who comes to the City by way of a big eight accounting firm, and the City's Productivity Commission, took over as Budget Director at the first of the year. She will be a new face before the Council and knows her stuff. But, she will need all her acumen to pass the budget without the Council making significant changes.

Continued on Page 5. See "Politics"

Perspectives

Next NC Target: Candidates/Commissioners

By Ken Draper

With a couple of important empowerment successes in their pocket, maybe it's time for Neighborhood Councils to begin looking for a new target. Forty protesting NC's changed the course of the Department of Water and Power rate increase proposal. They have leveraged an agreement with DWP to begin working on a system for inclusion the planning, policy and delivery of services process. Four east Valley councils have a Letter of Understanding with the Department of Public Works, the first step in a pilot program designed to involve councils in sidewalk repair, street paving and the myriad other DPW neighborhood services. So, what's next?

Over the next 30 days, while the City Council wrestles with the Mayor's budget, NC's of course will have a chance to press for their own preferred additions and deletions. Some councils are beginning to get their teeth into the various LAX modernization plans. Some NC's are actually signing on with the Lee Baca movement to get his ½ Cent Public Safety sales tax on the November ballot.

I'm pushing for a more strategic target, though. One that is critical to every Neighborhood Council, and ultimately, to the very core of the City's business. I'm talking about candidates and commissioners.

Continued on Page 5. See "Perspectives"

DWP Lowers Rate Hike Expectations: Now Asks for 11 Percent and 1-Year

By David Lowell

The Department of Water and Power has back-peddled its way into a revised water rate increase proposal. Having originally asked for an 18% increase over two years, they are now proposing 11% over one year. The DWP Commission is slated to consider the new request tomorrow at its 1:30 p.m. meeting.

Thirty-nine Neighborhood Councils had voted to oppose the original 18% request, principally on grounds that DWP budget planning lacked transparency and failed to make its case for the increase and that the DWP had bypassed NC's on their way to City Council approval.

The Neighborhood Council protest prompted a motion from City Councilman Greig Smith that sent the increase request back and required that any future requests for increases be accompanied by an independent financial analysis.

DWP is due back before the Commerce and Energy Committee on April 27 with the new numbers and, as requested by Committee Chair Tony Cardenas, some financial analysis supporting the need for 11%. The 11% over one year was a compromise suggested early on by some of the protesting Neighborhood Councils. It would allow, they argued, for the DWP to have some immediate funding support while they work out a longer term budget needs and arrange for independent financial analysis.

Continued bottom of next column. See "DWP"

City Watch Conversation With: Steve MacDonald

Can Bloom be Put Back on EIDC Rose?

(Steve MacDonald has been chosen to head the Entertainment Industry Development Corporation, which is still reeling from the controversy generated by his predecessor. MacDonald most recently worked for the Mayor at his South Valley office. He was with the Department of Building and Safety before that. Today (4/19) is MacDonald's first day as the new President of EIDC. City Watch asked him what he expects to find in the days ahead.)

City Watch: For the uninitiated, what does the EIDC do?

President MacDonald: The EIDC was founded in 1995 to make it more convenient and less bureaucratic for the film industry to obtain permits for the City of Los Angeles and the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The industry, at that time, was finding it hard to get all of the various city departments together to get the required permits. So, the EIDC was created to streamline the permit process.

City Watch: Is EIDC a part of City government?

MacDonald: No. Not at all.

City Watch: How does EIDC interact with the City?

MacDonald: EIDC has a contract with the City and with the County. We also have an agreement with the Los Angeles United School District and with Angeles Forrest. Primarily we work with cities, municipalities and agencies through contracts or memoranda of understanding to provide permitting services.

City Watch: As President of EIDC, to whom do you report?

MacDonald: I report to the Executive Committee of the EIDC Board of Directors.

Continued on Page 6. See "Conversation With ..."

Quotables

"Please allow us the space to get this right."

"The genie is out of the bottle, you needn't worry about this spreading."

"DONE needn't, and shouldn't, play a role in this. Not because DONE is bad or evil, just because the end result will be better if it remains NC driven."

Paul Waters
Studio City NC

*From report to the Education –
Neighborhoods Committee
on the NC/DPW Pilot project*

...

"I have not been given any hard and fast timelines, but certainly the goal is sooner rather than later."

President Steve MacDonald
EIDC

...

DWP-

Cont from previous column

Assuming the DWP Commission will support the 11% increase, as predicted, the proposal could get through Commerce and Energy on the 27th, into City Council for approval before mid-May and go into effect on June 1. It is likely that the modified proposal will have the support of most Neighborhood Councils who will then be watching to see how quickly, and in what form, the Smith motion moves through City Council and the search for independent financial analysts begins. ■

NC WATCH

An Insider Look at Neighborhood Councils

NC's & DWP Agree on Schedule, Goals for Partnership Agreement

By David Lowell

Neighborhood Council and Department of Water and Power representatives met Friday and agreed on a meeting schedule, perimeters and goals for creating a partnership agreement. The object of the agreement, according to Rusty Millar, one of the NC representatives, is to create a collaborative partnership between participating councils and the DWP that allows NC's into the process of formulating policy, programs and delivering services.

Letters will go out this week to Neighborhood Councils inviting them to participate on the negotiating Task Force and in the partnership agreement. Councils will have 30 days to provide an official elected or selected representative for the Task Force. The Department and the NC Task Force will begin work on the project in June. Meetings will be held on Saturdays and will be rotated between a Valley site and a location downtown.

The Partnership of Inclusion project is the outgrowth of the successful Neighborhood Council opposition to the proposed 18% DWP water rate increase. At a meeting on March 20 with NC representatives lead by west Valley activist Jim Alger, DWP agreed to help fashion a working relationship with Councils patterned somewhat after the Memorandum of Understanding worked out in January between four councils and the Department of Public Works. However, with the Partnership of Inclusion, more Neighborhood Councils will be involved and there is a difference in the nature of services delivered by DWP.

Continued on Page 4. See "Partnership"
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NC Cancels Election Plan Meeting Just Weeks After Canceling Election

By Ken Draper

Less than three weeks after canceling their General Election, the Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council interim board called off its election-planning meeting.

The group was to meet and discuss what could be done to right their election ship and to consider new timelines for preparing and rescheduling the canceled election. But, shortly into the agenda, the DONE Project Coordinator told the gathering that the meeting had not been posted as required by the Brown Act and a motion was made to halt the discussion and reschedule the planning meeting.

Continued next column

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, should participate on both the Task Force and the Partnership Committee.

Every participating Council will be represented on those committees 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. Those meetings will begin in June.

The officers of Neighborhood Councils with elected boards, will receive a letter the week of April 19 (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 30, contact Rusty Millar at larunner1@earthlink.net or 323.662.3324.

Continued from previous column-

The General Election, scheduled for March 30, was canceled the night before at an emergency meeting of the interim board. Issues over absentee ballots, slate campaigning, translations on election materials and outreach divided the group and set up the 8-6 decision to cancel the election.

Threats of challenges were made, one by an activist who claimed that outreach to the Latino community had fallen short and one by one of the council founders who claimed that the ballots and election materials had not been translated as completely as the bylaws required.

A couple of questions remain unanswered: Since none of the issues prompting the complaints and charges developed at the last minute, why did the interim board wait until the night before the election to address them? And, how much longer can these organizational faux pas continue before a concerned stakeholder steps forward and challenges this groups ability to represent the greater neighborhood? ■

Voices

(Letters to City Watch)

NC's Begin to Weigh In On LAX Plan

(Last week, Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski floated an option to the Mayor's Los Angeles International Airport modernization plan. NC's and stakeholders are beginning to weigh in.)

I strongly support and my Neighborhood Council has supported in principle City Councilwoman Miscikowski's disclosed details of a compromise plan for modernizing Los Angeles International Airport that would cost A FRACTION of Mayor James K. Hahn's \$9-billion makeover and leave the existing airport largely intact.

Her plan calls for a far more modest modernization, costing roughly \$3-billion. It would push the most controversial elements of Hahn's blueprint, including a passenger check-in center near the San Diego Freeway, off to a second phase that would proceed only after an extensive public review.

By contrast, Hahn's plan would dramatically change the way passengers use LAX by sending all private vehicles to the Westchester check-in center. It also calls for the demolition of Terminals 1, 2, and 3 and the parking garages in the central terminal area, replacing them with a new terminal complex.

However, I do not agree with Miscikowski that because state and federal environmental laws require the City to start the planning process when significant changes are made to Hahn's plan, that we work within existing environmental documents and the council approve Hahn's plan and send it to the Federal Administration for review.

El Segundo Mayor Mike Gordon said "We're concerned about approving Alternative D under any condition. Why don't we force this plan to be amended?"

The RAND study concluded that the airport would not be any less secure from attacks under Hahn's proposal. Approximately half of the flights at LAX are to Las Vegas, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Sacramento and San Francisco. I support the use of fast trains as in Europe and Japan to these locations. I support the expansion of Ontario, Palmdale, John Wayne with rapid transit to these locations from LAX.

Rapid transit is needed on the Westside of Los Angeles from UCLA to the Airport, from the North Valley through the Sepulveda Corridor connecting Century City to the airport.

Steve Twining, President
Bel Air-Beverly Crest NC

(Some letters are edited for clarity and/or brevity. Send your letters and comments to Editor at: sirken323@aol.com)■

Tracking the Issues (I-Trac)

04-0732 Police Commissioners report on new Adult Entertainment Ordinance.

04-0229 Categorical exemption for Masonic Temple on Wilshire. (City Council agenda for 4/20/04).

04-0255-S1 Support of Sheriff Lee Baca's ½ Cent Public Safety sales tax.

04-0002-S69 Support for the clean needle and syringe exchange bill (CA 2871).



Partnership- Continued from Page 3

"Both DWP and Neighborhood Councils understand," says Millar, "that this is a wonderful opportunity to set a precedent that can pave the way for relationships between city departments and NC's forever."

Now comes the test for Neighborhood Councils and the challenge for Millar and Alger: getting a sufficient number of NC's to participate on the negotiating Task Force to be taken seriously. Agendizing and voting on the rate increase issue is one thing. Committing to and participating in a process that could eliminate much of the cause for their protest is yet another. Once again, the City will be watching. ■

City Watch On-Line Address Book

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📖 DONE Website/links-
www.lacityneighborhoods.com

📖 LA City Website- www.lacity.org

Perspectives-Continued from Page 1

It is true that the one thing NC's cannot advocate for is individual political candidates. However, nothing prevents NC's from monitoring candidates and asking public questions in search of commitments. The number of sombreros in the mayoral candidate ring has started to swell. A crowded mayoral ballot could render the outcome a toss up. It would seem critical for Neighborhood Councils to know where these folks who would be Mayor, come down on NC's, the NC concept and the system. How committed are they to supporting Councils, enforcing the Charter mandate, maintaining the funding?

Then there are the City's commissioners. Laboring these days under the bright light of public scrutiny and in serous need of an image transplant. City commissioners are non-elected sorts with sizable influence, the ability to generate policy that affects our lives and the authority to commit millions of our tax dollars. With the number of Grand Jury inquiries, audits and investigations percolating around them these days ... especially the commissions for the three proprietary departments ... one must surely wonder: How did these guys get here?

Mayor Appointments

The Mayor appointed most of them. Council President Alex Padilla appointed a few when the Mayor missed a deadline. And, that system isn't going to change soon. It's a Charter matter. But nothing prevents Neighborhood Councils from submitting their own commissioner recommendations to the Mayor and doing some lobbying.

As one City Hall insider suggests, Neighborhood Councils can download the list of City Commissioners from the City website (www.lacity.org), find our whose term is expiring next and start making some recommendations. For starters, as City Controller, Laura Chick, recently reminded: the Airport Commission has an opening.

Change in City Government

Checking to see if any NC blood runs through a candidates veins. Influencing commissioner appointments. These are exercises in empowerment that can change very nature of City government. Can change Neighborhood Councils too, for that matter.

The question is: are Neighborhood Councils ready for this level of influence? Ready to make well thought out and credible recommendations and to push them through to commission appointments? In other words, as a City Hall veteran said recently, ready to stop whining about the appointments that are made and start recommending the ones they would like to see retained and the ones they would like to see added. ■

■■■■■

Politics-Continued from Page 1

The Mayor stated his priorities early on. His number one is making Los Angeles the safest big-city in the country. This is followed by improving neighborhood services and keeping LA's streets and sidewalks, safe and clean.

Hahn's budget will be officially released tomorrow. The City Council has 30 days to make changes. If the past is any indicator, they will focus on one or two high profile items to make their stand and differentiate their positions from the Mayor's. Last year's stand was on increasing the police force. They succeeded in blocking the Mayor's proposal and overriding a veto. This year, the Mayor is asking for only 30 officers, but it comes at the expense of the DARE anti-drug program, and others, each with their own constituency.

Continued on Page 6. See "Politics"

City Watch Issues DayPlanner

Tuesday April 20

DWP Commission (1:30p)
Considering new rate increase proposal

Budget & Finance-Canceled

Arts & Parks (8:30a)
*Cutbacks in County hospitals
Griffith Park landscaping contract
Program for buying prescription drugs from Canada*

Public Safety (1p)
*LAPD Consent Decree
LAPD flexible work schedule*

Wednesday April 21

PLUM (2p)
Prohibiting expansion of bail bond businesses in Little Tokyo

Housing (4p)
Transfer of funds from Affordable Housing trust to Winter Shelter program.

Tuesday April 27

Commerce & Energy (8:30a)
New DWP rate increase proposal

Saturday May 22

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

Citywide Alliance
(May meeting will be held at the Congress. Time/location/guests to be announced.)

■■■■■

Politics – Continued from Page 5

The Council's Budget and Finance Committee has the responsibility of taking the first whack at the Mayor's budget. It is chaired by former Police Chief Bernard Parks, no friend of the Mayor. Parks is considering a run for mayor himself and has an opportunity to use this budget to draw distinctions between his vision of the city and the Mayor's.

This is also an important budget for Council President Alex Padilla. He will need to guide the Council through some difficult decisions on a Mayor's budget that will likely include elimination of the environmental affairs Department, for example. Or he could come to that departments rescue with enough votes to override a veto.

Employee Unions

Then there are the city employee unions. They will actively oppose any layoffs or furloughs. The city workforce is already depleted through the hiring freeze and many employees are doing the jobs of two. Union leaders are elected by their membership. As elected officials in their own right, they are going to take positions that respond to the needs of their members. Mayor Hahn has tried to include union leadership in the decision-making around the budget to avoid any surprises. With his reelection year, he is counting on the support of the city employee unions. Remember, when he was elected, two city employee unions broke ranks with the rest of the labor community, by endorsing Hahn over his opponent. Layoffs and furloughs could potentially undermine support.

This year, Neighborhood Councils are also getting into the act. They have been included in the setting of budget priorities and the Mayor has invited down a group of Neighborhood Council presidents for a special budget briefing. While the councils generally do not support tax or fee increases, they may also object to the reduction of services.

Layoffs? Lost services? New revenues? Vetoes? Leadership? Stay tuned. ■

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Conversation With ... Continued from Page 2

City Watch: It's not news that EIDC has been through some turmoil over the past couple of years. It's early on for you, but what are some of the changes you already know will be necessary?

MacDonald: I start work on Monday (4/19) so I'm still getting up to speed on all of those issues. There are a number of things involving operations, financial issues and other things that we will take a hard look at, then I will come up with a number of proposals ... in concert with staff and the board ... over the next several weeks and months.

City Watch: Were you given any deadlines for getting things turned around?

MacDonald: I have not been given any hard and fast timelines, but certainly the goal is sooner rather than later.

City Watch: The work of EIDC can certainly affects neighborhoods. What is your plan for involving Neighborhood Councils?

MacDonald: City and County neighborhoods are already a much bigger part of the EIDC than they ever were, in the sense that there is both neighborhood and business-civic involvement on the board. At least seven to 10 different persons on the 32-person board represent a geographic area of the city or county. So, to that degree, they are already directly involved. Some of those folks are involved in Neighborhood Councils. It is critical that the EIDC reach out to neighborhoods, especially Neighborhood Councils, particularly in the heavily filmed areas because these are the folks that are impacted. We want to do what we can to help mitigate that impact.

Continued on Page 7. See "Conversation With ..."

What's In? What's Out? Mayor's 2004-2005 Budget

(The Mayor's budget will be made public tomorrow (4/20). Based on reports from some City Hall insiders, and from some of the pre-release comments of the Mayor himself, here are some of the "in's" and "out's" expected in his 2004-2005 budget proposal.)

- ◆ Add 30 new officers to LAPD. Reassign 50-plus officers to the street. Eliminate the DARE anti-drug program.

- ◆ \$5.3 billion budget. Roughly 3-4% over last year. No taxes. Some fee increases (e.g. building permits, city golf courses, LA Zoo).

- ◆ Consolidation of social service departments

- ◆ Elimination of Environmental Affairs Department. Some of EAD responsibilities to other departments.

- ◆ Redistribution of some Cultural Affairs Department responsibilities. Realignment of focus. Possible elimination of arts grants.

- ◆ Elimination of 300-400 city positions.

- ◆ Libraries will remain open, maintaining present hours. Building/remodeling of branches will continue. Bookmobiles may be cut.

- ◆ Street/sidewalk repairs remain in.

- ◆ Funding increase to Affordable Housing.

(Mayor's budget proposal goes to City Council on April 20. They have 30 days to revise, advise, amend. New fiscal year starts July 1, 2004.) ■

Conversation With ... Continued from Page 6

City Watch: If a Neighborhood Council does run into filming issues, where do they go for help? Can they come to you?

MacDonald: I welcome hearing about filming or permitting concerns. It should be noted though that a lot of these issues have to be worked out with the City, and to a lesser degree, with the County. The EIDC does not have legal authority enforce the guidelines of permits. In fact the EIDC isn't even required to notify neighborhoods. They have been doing that the last few years on their own and at their own expense. So, these are things that we need to look into to see what the EIDC should be doing. But at the moment, enforcement is not part of the EIDC responsibility. We don't have the manpower or resources to do that. It's important that we work with the City and find a way that can be done so neighborhoods are treated fairly.

City Watch: EIDC is a self-funded agency, is it not? Tax monies are not involved.

MacDonald: It is self-funded through the permit fees, paid for by the industry, for the convenience of having us run through the different hoops and pull together the permit.

City Watch: So, to be clear, you're saying that EIDC just issues the film permits, you don't control how many permits go into any particular area?

MacDonald: I welcome contact from such a neighborhood and we would work together with the City or County to come up with some guidelines. There is a precedent for that in certain areas that are heavily filmed. Hancock Park is an example.

City Watch: As you get ready to dig in to this new challenge, any other thoughts?

MacDonald: Yes. There has been a lot of controversy and negative press, but the bottom line is that the staff has continued, day in and day out, to issue permits. Those permits have allowed production to go on, delivering very needed jobs and revenue to the city. EIDC performs a very important function. We just need to take a look at streamlining some and getting EIDC moving forward on the right track.

(Steve MacDonald is the new President of the Entertainment Industry Development Corporation. He can be reached at 323.957.1000.) ■

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