

Helping SLO re' graffiti, etc

Posse
Neighborhood Beautification
February 16, 2010

Date: 2/16/2010
Submitted in: 544 Committee
Council File No: 09-0600-1519
Item No.: PC

Dear Councilmember Krekorian,

Deputy: _____

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on what is really the question before you – are Neighborhood Councils an essential service to the City of Los Angeles. I say that they are. The Neighborhood Councils (NCs) are the eyes and ears of the community. Without the NCs at this point in the City's journey, if there is any disaster, the loss of the NC's experienced community members will lead to mayhem.

Today, many Neighborhood Council members are CERT Trained. Many communities, based on their abilities, have supplies in the event of a disaster.

I would like to remind you of the Metrolink train accident. Who were some the first responders? It was the Chatsworth Neighborhood Council. What did they do – they provided food and water, comfort, and organization in the time of an accident so over whelming that Councilmember Alarcon told me that it was worse than the Northridge Earthquake. In fact, even though both Councilmember Alarcon and Councilmember Zine were both working to assist the injured at that accident, neither one knew the other was there until several days later.

The Station fire – The Sunland/ Tujunga Neighborhood Council was there to aide its community not only during the evacuations during the fire, but they now have to assist with the evacuations during our rain events which created flooding in those hillsides that were burned.

File number: 09-0600-S159

1) Should the CAO with appropriate stakeholders study the transfer of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment or Neighborhood Council (NC) funding program?

No – I believe that the CAO is already convinced that the NC system is not necessary to the City. The NCs are a legal part of the City system of government under the City Charter. They work with many departments such as City Planning and the LADWP to advise the agencies on various projects. Any action taken to remove the NC system will most likely lead to lawsuits and a further cost to the City.

As a relatively new NC Board Member, I have found DONE to be an important part of my training as an NC member. I therefore believe that this aspect of DONE should remain under their control. I also believe that NC members could be trained to assist DONE staff at training sessions.

Cut
city clerk
from elections

The City Clerk's office took over the NC elections for 2010. Because of the cuts to their budget, not only does the City have to pay to train the City Clerk's staff to run these elections, but the NCs are now forced to pay for their own outreach out of the NC budgets. The NCs could have run their own elections with almost the same amount of money as they are paying for NC election outreach. The City Clerk should be removed from the NC election process.

NC elections could be handled with a skeleton crew of the City Clerk's staff and NC volunteers.

09-0600-S159

2) Motion relative to the consideration of eliminating the Neighborhood Council "rollover" funds totaling \$1.61 million to the reserve fund.

I oppose the sweep of "reserve" funds to the general fund because many of these funds have already been allocated and spent. For example at the West Hills Neighborhood Council, the LAPD was granted funds for the new Topanga Police Station for necessary equipment. The LAPD has not yet received that entire grant.

In February 2009, the West Hills Neighborhood Council voted to support the West Valley Food Pantry with a donation of \$3500.00. The West Valley Food Pantry has not yet received this funding due to the paperwork backlog at DONE.

At a time when our City is facing 14 – 16% unemployment, there is in my opinion no better way to spend the money than to help our food pantries. These pantries will serve those who are the unemployed, the underemployed, and those who are affected by fires, floods, and other natural disasters.

09-0600-S159

3) Motion relative to the consideration of eliminating the NC bank card system and converting to a demand warrant system.

The cost of a demand warrant may even exceed the cost of what it is paying for. It delays the payment of NC expenses. In a situation as I stated above, the President and Treasurer of an NC need a bank card system that can be utilized on an emergency basis without oversight. It costs the City more money each time the appropriate documentation is missing to create a demand warrant. That City employee must set aside time to communicate with the NC Treasurer, put the demand on the back burner, and may not get back to the demand because the paperwork has landed in limbo.

A system of transparency can be set up where all NC Treasurers have access to the same NC Treasurer program. A program can be set up where DONE, the City Controller, the NC Treasurer, and NC members can all see where each transaction has occurred in real time. It will allow – in programs such as Quicken and Money – NCs to reconcile their budgets at the end of each month. A laptop with the program installed could be allocated to each NC so that all NCs are using the same equipment and the same programs. This will also lead to the creation of end of year statements with little difficulty.

09-0600-S159

4) Motion relative to the consideration of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, City Attorney, and City Administrative Officer evaluating and redefining allowable expenditure categories for Neighborhood Council funds.

I oppose the imposition of controls on the Neighborhood Councils of allowable expenditures with the exception of the same things that I believe should be imposed on all City employees – no expensive meals for Board members and no travel outside of the Los Angeles area on the tax payers dime.

I believe that the City Council should look at themselves and their own discretionary funds. I think that they should be thinking – if this was my own budget – what would I have to cut just to get by?

I believe that most people would say – we can no longer afford lavish parties. We should not hold meetings that require the expenditure of City money to by food for their guests.

Bank card available w/ transparency

Vote by mail must be reinstated

We can no longer afford to subsidize the police services for block parties and other events. If someone can afford to have a block party or studio event, they must fund the cost of police services.

When people do not have money enough to live on, they don't travel. The City employees should not be allowed to travel out of Los Angeles for conferences and other junkets. The City Council and the Mayor should realize that if it is necessary to cut one employee, then they should be here to discuss the seriousness of this situation – not going to Global Warming Conferences in Copenhagen.

A year ago, our City was discussing "Measure B". We were discussing our energy needs and the plans to implement a certain percentage of alternative energy by 2010. The City is in such gridlock that no one is even thinking about "Measure B", and the only solar project to come forward to the Council in recent months – the 55 MW First Solar project - was killed.

If the City Council does not want the NCs to tell them how to spend their discretionary funds, then the City Council should treat the NCs like they are intelligent adults who can determine the most important needs for their communities. NCs are not all the same – the needs of one are not the same needs of another. I believe that the NCs would agree that money set aside for emergencies, for emergency equipment, for the expenses of paid NC staff, websites, phone lines and email capabilities, could be agreed upon as essential needs for each NC.

In times of hardship, people spend more time enjoying their own local area. Therefore the libraries and the parks, our sporting venues, are essential services that we must keep open. As Councilmember Hahn said – for those who are inclined, we could create a GOLD library card for those who utilize the library system regularly and who can afford to donate to keep those services available.

We could sell license plates or license plate holders with our City Parks as the beneficiaries of the money collected for these luxuries. Plates could be for the ZOO, the Griffith Observatory, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Natural History Museum, the Southwest Museum, and other city landmarks and parks.

Similar plates or license plate holders could be sold to support our sporting complexes.

Instead of creating new taxes, find incentives, gift items like gift cards that can be used to create additional income for City income generating venues like the ZOO and other City assets.

We should create incentives to bring people out – discounts on our bus and subways – to take the community members to events that they may not be able to ordinarily afford.

It is well known that the experiment in Chicago of the sale of assets including parking did not help them escape their budget problems. The long term income generated by parking lots exceeds what can be gained in the short term by leases. The fact that the City has not collected many of the taxes that are owed to them by the parking companies should automatically lead to the conclusion that these particular companies cannot be relied upon to help the City with a steady flow of income.

The State of Illinois is trying to sell the toll way system. Their voters are saying "No".

09-0600-S159

Motion relative to the consideration of the General Manager, Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, issuing a memo to Neighborhood Councils regarding a proposed 50 percent reduction to the annual allocation for 2010 – 2011.

I oppose the reduction of any funds for NCs for the 2010 – 2011 year because many NCs must allocate their overhead, their costs of outreach, and other needs more than a year in advance. A reduction of 50 % would basically leave the NCs with operating expenses only – no reimbursement for agendas and minutes and other paperwork and websites necessary to comply with the Brown Act.

At VANC it was discussed and I support the departments within DONE that handle NC budgets to be transferred to the oversight of the City Controller. I believe that if the City Controller is unable to handle the oversight of the NC Budgets, she should hire an outside firm that is capable of doing so in a cost effective manner. These services must be performed by people who have this expertise – not just volunteers from the NCs or other City employees that have been transferred somewhere to fill a vacancy.

Thank you.

Chris Rowe

*West Hills Neighborhood Council

* speaking for self – for identification purposes only