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November 10, 2015

CF No: 14-0907

Honorable Members of the  
Los Angeles City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
Room 395, City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Members:

As requested by this Honorable Body, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Department) submits this report on engagement with the Neighborhood Councils regarding Citywide greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

Council File Motion # 14-0907, dated June 27, 2014, requests that the Department engage the 96 Neighborhood Councils of Los Angeles to assist in outreach for the effort to reduce the City's greenhouse gas emissions at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 Citywide.

The Department has engaged the Neighborhood Council Sustainability Alliance (NCSA) to address this issue with Neighborhood Councils. The NCSA is a Neighborhood Council alliance focused on advancing sustainability and resilience across Los Angeles through advocacy, sharing of best practices and community action. The NCSA proposal to address the greenhouse gas emissions issue is attached.

The Department will continue to work with the NCSA to engage Neighborhood Councils on the Cool Blocks LA and Cool City Challenge initiatives.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at (213) 978-1551.

Very truly yours,

  
Grayce Liu  
General Manager

Attachment

**NCSA Cool Blocks LA + Cool City Challenge initiative:  
Support for Council File 14-0907 ("80 x 50" motion)**

Prepared for: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment  
Prepared by: Laura Mack, NCSA Chair and Lisa Hart, NCSA board member

November 9, 2015

**Background**

City Council Motion # 14-0907, dated June 27, 2014, requests that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment engage the 96 neighborhood councils of Los Angeles to assist in outreach for the effort to reduce the City's greenhouse gas emissions at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 Citywide. In addition to strong and binding emissions reductions targets set by Local, State, Federal and International governments, there needs to be in place a robust and scalable grassroots model to engage residents on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood, house-by-house, business-by-business level if we are to truly turn around what appears to be a rapidly worsening climate crisis. As many pundits in the climate movement have suggested that the world looks to California for leadership, the City of Los Angeles then is in a unique position to lead California and therefore the world by establishing a model grassroots effort that can be shared and spread worldwide.

**Overview of the NCSA's "Cool Blocks LA" and "Cool City Challenge" initiatives**

In collaboration with community sustainability and transformation authority David Gershon of the Empowerment Institute, the NCSA has designed and plans to launch a "Cool Blocks LA" sustainable behavior change pilot program in early 2016. Cool Blocks LA will build carbon- and water-wise, disaster resilient, socially connected neighborhoods in the City of LA, leveraging the power of peer influence and social diffusion to foster change. By the end of the Cool Blocks LA pilot year, at least 10 neighborhood block teams representing three City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Council areas will complete the pilot program. In the process, these teams will reduce both their carbon and water footprints by an average of 25%, while building community and shared resiliency.

The 2016 "Cool Blocks LA" pilot will serve as the exclusive southern California demonstration project for both a broad-scale Cool Blocks LA program planned for 2017, as well as a follow-on, statewide "Cool City Challenge" carbon reduction initiative that to date has received \$60M in implementation plus X Prize award commitments. The Cool City Challenge initiative will provide \$2.5M funding and other support to assure that at least one City of LA community becomes carbon neutral by 2025, which in turn will help pave the way for the City to reduce citywide GHG emissions 80% by 2050.

The NCSA will work with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment to engage Neighborhood Councils on the Cool Blocks LA and Cool City Challenge initiatives, and leverage both to support "80 x 50" goals.

**Program approach and timeline**

As highlighted in the City of Los Angeles's Sustainable City pLAN, "Climate change is ... the biggest single challenge facing humanity, as it will bring dramatic changes to Los Angeles in the coming years, including wide-ranging effects on the health and welfare of residents."

Approximately forty percent of carbon emissions in Los Angeles come from households. The Cool Blocks LA pilot program will directly address household-level behavior change while fostering long-term health and quality of life for Angelenos. It supports the Sustainable City pLAN's vision for sustainability and resilience for LA, and builds on the knowledge of what can be achieved based on decades of experience fostering pro-social behavior change in peer groups and communities.

A neighborhood block is the organizing unit for this social change initiative.

In collaboration with the Dept. of Neighborhood Empowerment, Neighborhood Councils, and Cool City Challenge director David Gershon, the NCSA will facilitate the selection of 10 "Cool Block" neighborhoods and leaders at three "Cool Block Cafe" events. Each participating neighborhood will be supported in the formation of a Cool Block Team of neighbors who live on a single block or in the same building. Following in-person training of Cool Block Leaders, each team will meet nine times over a five-month period, for the shared purpose of supporting their peers' desires to live climate-friendly, healthy and sustainable lifestyles; improve personal and collective disaster resiliency; build social bonds; and enhance the livability of their block.

Participants will select the actions that support their goals from a menu of 112 options provided in a companion guidebook. Some actions will be completed as individuals, and others are collaborative and will be carried out by the Cool Block Team.

To address any challenges that arise and support desired outcomes, the NCSA will provide ongoing coaching to each Cool Block Team.

The program will culminate in a "Cool Block Party" to celebrate each Cool Block's achievements. We will invite participation by the Mayor's Office, the City Council, the Dept. of Neighborhood Empowerment, and other city agencies.

Following completion of the Cool Blocks LA program pilot, the NCSA will host a debriefing session with Cool Block Leaders to capture successes and lessons learned, and begin planning for a broader rollout in 2017.

### **Approach to fostering household carbon reduction and other sustainable behaviors**

Behavior change (and particularly the behavior change needed to effectively address climate change) is notoriously difficult to achieve.

The Cool Blocks LA and Cool City Challenge behavior change model uses an evidence-based approach that incorporates social and environmental psychology principles and that has been demonstrated to achieve significant and sustained behavior change.

The primary behavioral change principles that are built into the model and ensure its effectiveness include: social norms; peer support; incentives; commitments; prompts; convenience; accountability; and social diffusion.

Mr. Gershon, who has 30 years' experience facilitating social behavior change across 300 cities, will provide extensive training and ongoing coaching to program managers and Cool Block Leaders to ensure that the principles are effectively executed.

Any unforeseen barriers will be addressed in future iterations of the program once the pilot is complete.

## **Program evaluation**

We will measure and evaluate the following types of outputs and outcomes:

- carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas pollution avoided
- resiliency and livability ratings
- number of sustainable actions taken
- program participation and growth

In consultation with Mr. Gershon and others, the NCSA will design, implement, and analyze pre- and post- surveys related to the above measures.

Finally, we will measure environmental outcomes that include greenhouse gas emissions reductions and water savings per household, using online calculator tools that estimate resource savings from actions taken.

## **What makes Cool Blocks LA unique?**

The NCSA is the only organization in the City of Los Angeles to systematically bring together Neighborhood and Community Councils—hubs of civic engagement in LA, representing 99 communities—to achieve collective impact on local sustainability and resilience issues. We offer a unique and vital platform to connect, educate, and engage community members on such topics, in collaboration with city agency and nonprofit partners.

Our “Cool Blocks LA” pilot program will be the first of its kind, anywhere in the world. The Cool Blocks program builds on and integrates 30 years of experience by the Empowerment Institute and more than 300 communities around the globe which have formed neighborhood-scale “EcoTeams” to foster healthy, sustainable communities.

The Cool Block approach is unique to grassroots sustainability behavior change programs in its ability to improve neighborhoods in a manner that: consistently achieves high impact results, including carbon and water reductions of 25% or greater; is measurable; promotes social connections; is cost effective; and is highly scalable.

## **Project team and partners**

The Neighborhood Council Sustainability Alliance (NCSA), formed in 2014, is an alliance of green, sustainability and beautification committees of Neighborhood Councils. The mission of the NCSA is to advance citywide sustainability and resilience through advocacy, sharing of best practices, and community action. NCSA Chair Laura Mack and NCSA board member Lisa Hart will manage Cool Blocks LA; each brings many years of community sustainability, social change, and project facilitation experience to this initiative.

David Gershon, co-founder and CEO of Empowerment Institute and designer of the Cool Block, Cool City Challenge, and other sustainable behavior change programs, is one of the world’s foremost authorities on behavior change, community empowerment and large-system transformation. He applies this expertise to issues requiring community, organizational, and societal change.

Mr. Gershon’s clients include cities, large organizations, government agencies, and social entrepreneurs. He has addressed a wide diversity of issues ranging from low carbon lifestyles, livable neighborhoods, and sustainable communities to organizational talent development, corporate social engagement, and cultural transformation. Over the past thirty years the programs he has designed have won many awards, and a major academic research study described them as “unsurpassed in changing behavior.”

Mr. Gershon will provide \$30,000 in in-kind support, through the provision of Cool Block guidebooks and related materials, intensive in-person capacity building training, and project team consulting services.

The NCSA has secured support for Cool Blocks LA from the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Council District 5, and seeks additional program support from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, the LADWP, and other organizations.

### **Cool Blocks LA scalability and support for "80 x 50" motion**

One of the strengths of the Cool Blocks LA program is that its foundation program, EcoTeams, has been successfully implemented in over 300 cities across the world, and has been proven to be highly scalable and replicable.

David Gershon will serve as a consultant on the pilot program, and work closely with the NCSA board to develop an effective architecture for scaling up the program.

Our plan is to pilot the program in "early adopter" LA neighborhoods in 2016 while growing a solid Cool Blocks program foundation and developing trained Cool Block leaders who can support follow-on work. We will then be poised to expand the Cool Block program exponentially in 2017-2018.

Cool Blocks are designed to engage in a web of mutual support with surrounding blocks, and through this mechanism have been shown to not only sustain behavior change, but expand it. Cool Neighborhoods can be created out of 10 adjacent Cool Blocks. The benefits of scale include such things as solar installations that serve entire neighborhoods and community carbon offset programs to invest in local renewable energy or urban forestry projects.

In alignment with the Sustainable City pLAN, our long-term goal is to engage 15% of City of LA households in the Cool Blocks LA program—a demonstrated tipping point for social change.

By the end of 2018, Cool Blocks LA will put Los Angeles in an ideal position to serve as a participant in the statewide "Cool City Challenge" -- an initiative that will fund 20 California cities to lead the way to a healthy carbon future by 2020 -- and will demonstrate LA's ability to achieve citywide "80 x 50" goals.