

A City Hall Miracle: LA 2020 Recommendations Appear on the City Council Agenda

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LA WATCHDOG-On Friday afternoon, January 9, 2015, City Council President Herb Wesson placed the LA 2020 Commission report, A Time for Action, and its recommendations on the City Council agenda for Tuesday, January 20.

Herb also posted on the Council File Management System the report of the September 26, 2014 meeting of the Rules Committee where he and Tom LaBonge spent seventeen minutes discussing the unanimous recommendations of the twelve members of the LA 2020 Commission.

According to several City Hall sources, these two actions were in direct response to our Friday CityWatch article, Why is LA's City Council Ignoring the Recommendations of the LA 2020 Commission? This column was critical of Wesson because of the City Council's failure to even consider these common sense recommendations that were supported by organized labor, the business community, the nonprofit sector, members of the State and County political establishment, and the media.

Even though it has been over nine months since the LA 2020 Commission made its recommendations at a press conference where the smiling Wesson was center stage, we should not expect too much from the City Council on January 20. The Council will likely follow the lead of the Rules Committee and refer these recommendations to its various Committees for further study.

The Job Creation recommendations of the LA 2020 Commission involving the development of economic clusters for Bioscience and Technology, Manufacturing, and Environmental Regulation and Testing were referred to the Economic Development Committee chaired by Curren Price.

Price's committee will also review the establishment of a Regional Tourism Authority along with the Tom LaBonge's Trade, Commerce, and Tourism Committee.

LaBonge is also charged with reporting back on increased collaboration between the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach. This may include a 50-50 Joint Powers Agreement to oversee the operation of the combined ports.

The Planning and Land Use Management Committee chaired by Jose Huizar will report back on the updating the City's 35 Community Plans which will allow residents, businesses, investors, and City Hall to have a clearer understanding of the zoning rules so that they are not "subject to the whims of special interests, nimbyism, and individual elected officials."

Of the three recommendations relating to Fiscal Stability, only the Truth in Budgeting Ordinance will be considered by Paul Krekorian's Budget and Finance Committee. This involves a three-year budget cycle

which will make it more difficult for the City to engage in budget shenanigans such as banking police overtime.

Unfortunately, Herb has decided to duck the two suggestions related to pensions, including the establishment of a more realistic investment rate assumption based on the returns used by Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway fame and fortune. The City Council is also ignoring the call to establish a "Commission on Retirement Security" to "review the City's retirement obligations in order to promote an accurate understanding of the facts" and to make "concrete recommendations on how to achieve equilibrium on retirement costs by 2020."

The LA 2020 Commission also called greater Transparency and Accountability. But once again, Herb is only considering one of the three recommendations. This involves holding municipal elections at the same time as the state and federal elections in order to increase voter participation. This will be on the March ballot.

Herb has ignored the establishment of an independent, professionally staffed Los Angeles Utility Rate Commission modeled after the California Public Utilities Commission that would appoint the General Manager and set rates with the intent of limiting the interference in the operations and finances of our Department of Water and Power by City Hall.

Herb has also failed to consider one of the Commission's top recommendation, the creation of an independent "Office of Transparency and Accountability" to oversee the City's finances and the efficiency of its operations.

Our Elected Elite will proclaim that they are making progress on the findings and recommendations of the LA 2020 Commission. But the failure to consider the Los Angeles Utility Rate Commission, the Commission on Retirement Security and a lower investment rate assumption, and most importantly, the Office of Transparency and Accountability demonstrates that Herb Wesson is not willing to engage in real reform of the City's finances. This may result in a service bankruptcy and the dumping of \$25 to \$30 billion of liabilities on our children and grandchildren.

It will be a miracle if the self-serving members of the Herb Wesson led City Council engage in real reform of the City's finances and operations.

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