



August 20, 2015

Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, Intergovernmental Relations,
and Neighborhoods Committee
Councilmember Herb Wesson, Chair
Councilmember Jose Huizar
Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson

RE: CF 15-0389, 15-0524

Agenda No. (11)

Dear Committee Chair Wesson,

On behalf of the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC), I am writing in favor of the Motion to allow neighborhood councils and alliances to have additional time to speak at City Council meetings and Committees. We are also asking that neighborhood councils be given the opportunity to speak prior to public comment and have a seat at the table.

It is appropriate that we ask that our position be in the record because this idea originated with the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils where it received a *unanimous* vote. This recommendation was presented at the 2014 Neighborhood Council Congress and was applauded and cheered by those attending citywide.

The Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils is the oldest and largest neighborhood council alliance in the City. We represent the 34 councils in the Valley and are in our 13th year! VANC meets regularly once a month with representatives from certified councils. VANC offers planning forums, training workshops and Mixers where we have 100% Valley neighborhood council attendance. Our monthly meetings have elected officials and department heads as well as other guest speakers of the highest level, and strive to educate our members on State and Citywide issues, as well as Valley issues.

This Motion is symbolic for neighborhood councils because it acknowledges that councils are a City entity, that we are part of the City family, and that we should be treated as such. By having one voice, and allowing alliances to speak officially, alliances enhance the strength of all neighborhood councils.

Thank you for your consideration and your support of neighborhood councils.

Sincerely,

Jill Banks Barad, Founder and Chair, VANC

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VANC Recommendations to the 2014 Congress of Neighborhoods

1. **Neighborhood Councils and Alliances which speak *officially* on behalf of their council or alliance should be given at least five minutes to testify before the City Council or a City Council Committee.**

Neighborhood Councils are members of the City family and should be treated that way, not just when the City Council *feels* like it. It is not fair to have neighborhood council members come all that way to City Hall and then only let them speak for two minutes, and sometimes, only ONE minute. Limiting the neighborhood council's time to speak is the City Council's tactic to marginalize the public.

2. **Land Use Committees must ensure against a Conflict of Interest.**

It should be mandated that all members of a Land Use Committee be required to take Ethics and Conflict of Interest Training, stakeholders as well as Board members. Because of its importance to the community and to the City, it is critical for all Land Use Committee members to comply with the State's Ethics Training requirements. Perception is everything!

To preserve the integrity of the Committee's and the Board's deliberations, we must prevent the *appearance* of a Conflict of Interest by educating Land Use Committee members to recuse themselves from *discussion and voting* if they have any stake in a development project

Each Neighborhood Council Board should take this responsibility seriously to include this requirement into its bylaws, or Standing Rules, specifically referencing non-Board members who serve on the Land Use Committee.

3. **People who run neighborhood council elections should NOT be *deciding* election challenges.**

We need *independent* panels to look at the evidence of all challenges and make the determinations. Allowing the people who run the elections to make the determinations is a conflict of interest and calls to question their rulings.

4. **DONE is dominated by a Funding Department that makes up its own rules.**

The DONE Funding Department makes up its own "rules *du jour*" and then keeps changing them, which is very stressful to everyone. They should be consistent.

DONE's funding rules and policies are confusing, overly detailed and onerous for neighborhood council treasurers and tedious for Board members and the public.

5. DONE should return to being empowering and supportive of neighborhood councils.

DONE has become controlling and micro-managing, putting undue burdens on NCs. The paperwork and endless forms causes burn-out and overworked volunteers to leave the councils.

The budget package Strategic Plan and Outreach Plan forms were unnecessarily detailed and repetitive. Because of the limited time frame DONE imposed, many NCs had to schedule Special Meetings to complete and vote on the forms.

6. Neighborhood Councils should be able to carry-over funds.

If the City Council can carry over funds from one fiscal year to another, neighborhood councils should be able to do it as well. When we are not allowed to carry-over funds, the neighborhood councils do “panic-spending”. This is never a smart way to spend money.

7. We should revisit the role and function of BONC.

The Charter spells out the role of BONC: Create and de-certify neighborhood councils. There are no more neighborhood Councils to create and it is rare that a council is de-certified.

Since Neighborhood Council bylaws follow the Brown Act, as well as other rules and regulations of the State and City, it is not necessary to have another entity creating more rules and regulations. BONC has turned itself into another “Control Center”.

8. City Departments should have designated Liaisons with Neighborhood Councils.

Although this working relationship is spelled out in the Plan for Neighborhood Councils, it has not been implemented. The key problems in our communities deal with DOT, BSS and Planning. We need to have a designated liaison and that person should interface with the NC regularly to give updates from their department and to solicit input from the community.

9. Funding for ongoing services should be automatically carried forward to the next fiscal year.

Funding for ongoing services that NCs need for their operation, including, but not limited to storage, translation, transcribing, phone service, and website maintenance, should be *automatically* carried forward to the next fiscal year.

10. Councils need a stronger and more positive City Attorney presence.

It is often the case that the City Attorneys assigned to neighborhood councils tell the Boards what they cannot do, not what they *can* do. We want to hear, “what can I do to help?” And if we don’t need help, get out of the way.

It also would be very beneficial if City Attorneys would assume more of an advocacy role with NCs, providing affirmative help and counsel to Boards and committees, especially with land use issues. There are instances when NCs need the presence of a City Attorney, especially at heated and controversial land use meetings, both at the committee level, and at the full Board. NCs should be able to request to have an attorney present at such a meeting. The developers have their attorneys and consultants present. We should not have to fend for ourselves.

Presented by Jill Banks Barad, Founder and Chair

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