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August 20, 2019

Honorable Members of the Health, Education,
Neighborhoods, Parks, Arts, and River Committee
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: COUNCIL FILE 18-0467 - NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL SYSTEM REFORMS

Dear Honorable Members:

The Neighborhood Council (NC) System Reforms, adopted by the Los Angeles City Council on January 16, 2019, instructed the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Department) to develop resources for the Neighborhood Council System, report back on the implementation of trainings and conduct further analysis of the governing structure of Neighborhood Councils.

With the conclusion of the Neighborhood Council election on June 20, 2019, the Department is working to achieve Council's instructions and appreciates the opportunity to provide updates on the Department's progress.

Best Practices for Neighborhood Councils

The Department is the lead department in the development of the Office of Community Engagement Task Force, working to engage City Departments on best practices for assisting Neighborhood Councils. The Department has developed a roster of City "engagement" staff and will continue to develop a more robust rolodex of City staff to be shared with the Neighborhood Council System. The Department is assisting the Neighborhood Councils coordinate with City Departments for the annual Congress of Neighborhoods to facilitate additional community engagement opportunities. Finally, the Department has shared the "[DIY Great Streets Manual](#)" with Neighborhood Councils, which provides information about the City's permit and public improvement process and future workshops can be developed.

Shared Space for Neighborhood Councils

Through the City's open data initiatives, information related to City properties are available, and the Department can develop "asset-mapping" workshops to assist Neighborhood Councils in identifying meeting locations and office space. The Department currently provides locations for public facilities on the Department's website. With the addition of data sets and staff training, additional public resources will become available for the Neighborhood Councils to utilize.

Required Planning and Land Use Training

The Department of City Planning (DCP), in partnership with the Department, has developed "Planning 101" trainings for the Neighborhood Council System. Launched in 2017, "Planning 101" is an educational initiative that provides the public with an overview of basic elements of the planning and development process.

Topics covered by past Planning 101 trainings include Policy Planning, Project Planning, Community Planning, and most recently, Planning for the Environment. The trainings were rolled out as a series, with duplicate events made available across the City, one in each Area Planning Commission area. Collectively, Planning 101 trainings have been attended by over 1,500 community members that identified as Neighborhood Council members, students, government and community-based organization employees, planning and public policy professionals, and interested residents from all areas of the City.

The Department has implemented a new online training portal for Neighborhood Council board members on Cornerstone, which is the online training portal for City employees. Any additional future training can be developed for this on demand type of platform.

Neighborhood Council Selection

The Department provides a set of formal rules, guidelines and a process for Neighborhood Council selections. The Department requires Neighborhood Councils to submit a "Selection Procedures Stipulation Worksheet," which supplements the policies and procedures of the Neighborhood Council Election Manual. The "Selection Procedures Stipulation Worksheet" requires a Neighborhood Council to submit an outreach plan which outlines the outlets and strategies a Neighborhood Council will utilize to recruit candidates and publicize the selection.

Currently, five (5) Neighborhood Councils opt for a selection to determine their governing board (Chatsworth, Northridge South, Bel Air Beverly Crest, Westside and Harbor City). In the 2019 Neighborhood Council Election Cycle, three (3) Neighborhood Councils conducted selections (Chatsworth, Westside and Harbor City Neighborhood Councils).

Based on the Department's experience with selections, selections can be just as open, transparent and robust as elections. For example, during the 2016 Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council selection, a total of four events on two different days were conducted to increase voter access, resulting in 1,110 voters. Chatsworth Neighborhood Council has consistently had a robust voter turnout, resulting in:

690 voters - 2014	557 voters - 2017
466 voters - 2015	246 voters - 2018
374 voters - 2016	398 voters - 2019

Demographics

The Department conducted a self-response demographic survey of Neighborhood Council Board Members in 2017 to establish a baseline roster of gender, age range, and ethnicity of the Neighborhood Council System. The Department is conducting a survey of the Neighborhood Council System to gather demographic data post-elections, and expects completion of the survey by September 2019.

The demographic data collected can be compared to Census data to encourage Neighborhood Councils to engage stakeholders to increase greater diversity within the Board in areas where representation is not currently present. The Department has shared Census and other demographic data with all 99 Neighborhood Councils in October 2018 and is in the process of developing an online platform where demographic data can be more easily accessible and utilized.

Board Structure Equity

The Department is working to train staff to utilize data management programs and data mapping software to assist in the data analysis of developing a “more equitable allocation of seats.” Currently, to assess the allocation of “homeowners” compared to “renters” for Neighborhood Councils with those seat categories, staff must manually select each parcel on ZIMAS and stitch the total number of parcels together for each zoning category to conduct the analysis. Zoning data of the parcels in Los Angeles exist and the data can be “layered” on a data visualization program with additional staff training.

Due to the wide variety of seat categories within the Neighborhood Council System, determining the proportion of seats allocated to “residency” will require further analysis of establishing seats solely dedicated to those who “live” within the boundaries of a Neighborhood Council.

Uniform Age for Voting and Board Participation

The Department conducted an analysis of Article X, Section 3 of Neighborhood Council bylaws. Of the 99 Neighborhood Councils:

46 Neighborhood Councils establish the minimum voting age at sixteen (16) years old

15 Neighborhood Councils will need to increase the minimum voting age

38 Neighborhood Councils will need to lower the minimum voting age

The Department can provide a “Stipulation Worksheet” to each Neighborhood Council to implement the Neighborhood Council Reform of establishing the minimum voting age to 16.

Youth Seat

The Department conducted an analysis of Article V, Section 1 and Attachment B of Neighborhood Council bylaws. Of the 99 Neighborhood Councils:

52 Neighborhood Councils do not have a “Youth Seat”

30* Neighborhood Councils have an elected “Youth Seat” *(1 NC with elected and appointed)

17 Neighborhood Councils have an appointed “Youth Seat”

1 Neighborhood Council has a selected “Youth Seat”

The Department also found 15 variations of board seats designated to youth and/or the advocacy of youth.

The Department can provide a “Stipulation Worksheet” for each Neighborhood Council to provide guidance on options available to them and the potential impacts of each option. Each Neighborhood Council will discuss and take Board action, then submit the completed Stipulation Worksheet to the Department for implementation.

Neighborhood Council System Branding

The EmpowerLA brand was created by a marketing company retained by the previous General Manager in order to capture the spirit of the Neighborhood Council system based on the tagline “Empower Yourself, Empower Your Community, Empower LA.”

In response to Council instructions, the Department has not made any further purchases of promotional items after the 2019 Neighborhood Council Elections. Although fiscal year 2019-20 is a non-election year, the Department continues outreach efforts and will deplete existing stores of promotional items this year to maximize our reach to various communities at public events.

With the new General Manager anticipated to start in September, a rebranding of the department can be developed further at that point.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grayce".

Grayce Liu
Interim General Manager
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.