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January 15, 2020

Health, Education, Neighborhoods,
Parks, Arts, and River Committee
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall

**SUBJECT: 2019 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS AFTER ACTION
REPORT**

Honorable Members:

RECOMMENDATION

NOTE AND FILE this report inasmuch as it is submitted for information only.

SUMMARY

For the first time since 2010, the Office of the City Clerk (City Clerk) conducted all aspects of the 2019 Neighborhood Council (NC) Elections. This included the development of citywide election procedures and deadlines, candidate filing, polling place recruitment, poll worker recruitment and training, ballot development, Election Day operations, and ballot tally and canvass for up to 99 NCs.

In addition to outlining the 2019 NC Election process, this report highlights challenges that arose in providing election support to NC stakeholders and how to mitigate them for future elections. The department will address candidate participation, accessibility issues, voter wait times, and language requirements necessary to assist all voters.

Additional funding to address areas for improvement have been included in the City Clerk's FY 2020-21 Budget Request:

- Hire additional As-Needed staff for administrative support and staffing the polls
- Increase polling place signage and include more ADA supplies
- Increase the number of poll workers and translators
- Institute optional Vote by Mail program

The City Clerk will be forming an NC Work Group consisting of City Clerk staff and NC Board Members to assist in further identifying areas for improvement. Our office is confident that with the assistance of the NC Work Group, and a realignment of

resources, we will be able to address many of the identified issues. City Clerk staff will work closely with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), the City Attorney's Office, and NCs to ensure that any policy issues that arose in 2019 are addressed before the next set of NC elections take place in 2021.

BACKGROUND

For the 2019 election season, The City Clerk was tasked with carrying out the full implementation of up to 99 NC elections and successfully conducted 81 board elections. The following outlines each task associated with the 2019 NC elections, challenges that arose, and how the City Clerk proposes to address the issues before the next NC elections in 2021.

Bylaws Review

The City Clerk had to complete several critical tasks in preparation of the NC elections which included reviewing the bylaws of all 99 NCs for the following information:

- Boundaries (Article III)
- Governing board composition (Article V)
- Board member terms and term limits (Article V)
- Minimum voting age(s) (Article X)
- Method(s) of verifying stakeholder status (Article X)
- Restrictions on candidates running for multiple board seats (Article X)
- Candidate and voter eligibility requirements (Attachment B)

The City Clerk used this information to create voting models, which helped staff identify different ballot styles and determine which ballots voters were entitled to receive. NCs were provided an opportunity to review these voting models to verify that the City Clerk interpreted their bylaws correctly. The information was also used to determine candidate and voter age requirements, which seats were up for election, and specific requirements for each board seat, candidate, and voter.

Candidate Filing

For two consecutive NC election years, the City Clerk has provided an online candidate filing portal for potential candidates to submit their applications. The portal was developed in-house and updated with the most recent bylaw information for all NCs.

All candidates had to provide identification to establish their eligibility for their respective board seat. Because of the wide variation in NC bylaws, the documentation requirements for these seats vary. To help candidates determine which documents they could provide, the City Clerk updated the NC Election Documentation Guide.

During the candidate filing period, staff provided telephone support to stakeholders who had questions about candidate requirements or needed assistance with entering their information into the portal. To further assist candidates, the City Clerk developed

candidate filing videos, updated the NC Election Candidate Information Guide and provided candidates with the NC Candidate Guidelines. The City Clerk also developed a website for candidates to post their photo and candidate statement as a resource for the public. Staff placed these tools on the City Clerk - Election Division's website for direct and easy access.

Staff reviewed each candidate's application and documentation to ensure it met the requirements of the board seat. If the information on the candidate's application was incorrect or the documentation was insufficient, an email (along with a follow-up call) was sent to the candidate explaining the issue and what was required in order to be certified.

Once the candidate filing period closed, candidates who entered their applications in the portal before the deadline had three days to provide the required documentation for the board seat (if they had not already done so). The list of certified candidates for each NC was placed on the City Clerk - Election Division's website and a copy of the list was sent to the NCs and DONE.

The City Clerk collaborated with DONE to host nine regional candidate workshops, including the Rally in the Valley and Show the Way, South LA. At these workshops, staff accepted paper candidate applications, assisted candidates with entering their applications in the portal, provided language assistance for non-English speaking candidates, and reviewed required documentation for candidates.

At the conclusion of the candidate filing period, 13 elections were suspended as a result of a lack of candidates. The board affirmation process was used to seat their board members. An additional five NCs opted for the selection process and did not participate in City Clerk elections.

Election Handbook

An updated Election Handbook was sent to all NCs for review and input before the start of the election cycle. Staff reviewed the feedback received from the NCs and incorporated many of the suggestions. The Handbook covered policies pertaining to candidate filing, NC election dates, poll worker and polling place recruitment, Election Day operations, election results, post-election procedures, and public records requests. On December 7, 2018, the Handbook was finalized and made available on our Election Division's website.

Polling Place and Poll Worker Recruitment

The 2019 Election Information Sheet was sent to NCs to identify their preference in poll locations, voting hours, and translation services. The preferred poll locations were recruited unless locations were unavailable. In these cases, staff worked with the NCs to identify another location suitable for a polling place.

Also in 2019, an online poll worker recruitment application was developed for individuals interested in serving as poll workers for NC elections. Fifty-one poll worker applications

were received through the new application. In an effort to improve the voting environment and create a uniform, consistent process across all NC elections, the City Clerk developed the 2019 NC Poll Worker Handbook for all NC poll workers and conducted a series of regional poll worker trainings approximately six weeks prior to Election Day.

Polling Place Supplies

In preparation for Election Day, staff created and assembled 81 NC-specific polling place supplies for each election. The NC-specific voting materials included: official ballots, bylaw information sheets, maps, and Voter Information Binders which contained ballot statement(s), bylaws, ballot voting models, and list of certified candidates for poll workers to reference on Election Day. The NC map, voting hours, electioneering restrictions and other voter information were placed on a kiosk outside of the polling place. A second kiosk with the same information was also placed inside the poll location along with a third kiosk that displayed the candidate statements for all the candidates listed on the ballot(s). Generic election supplies such as the Inspector and provisional supplies, voting booths, polling place signage, directional arrows and tables and chairs were also assembled for each NC.

Election Days

Voter wait times varied from election to election. In low turnout elections, voters typically voted in less than five minutes. In medium to high turnout elections, voters had to wait between five and 15 minutes in order to vote. Only in instances of very high turnout elections (1,000+ voters) did voters have to wait up to 45 minutes. (Note: The NCs method of verifying their stakeholders and amount of ballots available to voters were also factors in wait times. Self-affirmation NCs only require their voters to complete a voter registration form to receive a ballot(s). Documentation-required NCs require their voters to show documentation to prove their stakeholder status which takes longer to process. Poll workers then determined which ballot(s) a voter was eligible for, which also contributed to extended wait times).

All stakeholders were allowed to vote provisionally if their eligibility was in question, or if they were missing any required documentation. Provisional voters had three business days after Election Day to submit the required information in order for their vote to count. The City Clerk also provided curbside voting at every polling place. This allowed voters with mobility issues to register and vote from their vehicles.

New NCs

Two NCs held their first Board member elections (Historic Cultural North and North Westwood). Historic Cultural North's election was in Region 6 and had 469 voters turn out for their first election. North Westwood moved from Region 11 to Region 4 to allow for students to vote before the summer break. They had 313 voters turn out for their first election.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

During the election season, staff encountered administrative challenges that were communicated by various means, including the NC feedback sessions as well as ongoing stakeholder input, which had an adverse impact on election operations.

Limited Staff for Overall Election Support

The City Clerk's NC Unit consisted of five Election Administrators (EAs). EAs served as NC liaisons. Each conducted the complete review of NC bylaws as well as directed and oversaw all aspects of the election process. Staff was unable to keep up with the workload of being available to support their 20 assigned NCs, while working to ensure the uniqueness of each NC was being properly represented in each aspect of the election development phase.

Polling Place Supplies

On Election Days, stakeholders from multiple NCs expressed their frustration with the lack of signage. More signage was needed to direct voters to the entrance of the polling place and to find curbside voting services. Candidates and voters were also upset at the poor visibility of the candidate statements at the polling place. Although staff printed and placed the statements on kiosks displayed at the polling place, voters expressed the need to have the statements available while voting as a reference.

Poll Worker Recruitment

While staff developed an online application to reach a larger population of stakeholders, we were unable to recruit and hire a sufficient number of poll workers to properly staff each polling place or to satisfy the language requirements per NC. One of the main reasons was due to the small stipend of \$50 for both training and Election Day work. The Division had to rely on current Election staff as well as recruit other Department staff to fulfill the staffing and language needs. On several occasions, staff had to shuttle poll workers from one location to another in response to the staffing and translator shortages.

In an attempt to address some of these challenges, the City Clerk has included in the Fiscal Year 2020/21 Budget Request, additional funding to: hire six seasonal staff to assist with bylaw reviews and attend NC board meetings to support their election administrative needs; increase and enhance signage at all polling places (mostly ADA-compliant supplies); and increase overall poll worker recruitment by implementing an hourly rate, rather than a stipend.

STATISTICS

Candidate Filing

The number of candidates who applied to run for a board seat and were certified increased from 2016. In 2016, 1,722 candidates were certified to run for 1,309 open board seats. In 2019, 1,804 candidates were certified to run for 1,297 open board seats, a 4.5% increase (see Exhibit 1).

In 2019 our office certified 87% of candidates who filed to run while in 2016, we certified 82%. This 5% increase can be attributed to staff's enhanced guidance to candidates regarding board seat qualifications. For those who ultimately were not certified, the most common reason was a failure to submit qualifying documentation.

As mentioned earlier, 13 NC elections were suspended due to a lack of candidates. Candidates who were certified to run for seats in these NCs were seated in accordance with DONE's Board Affirmation guidelines.

Turnout

Nearly 22,800 voters in 81 NCs cast ballots for approximately 1,800 candidates (see Exhibit 1). In 2016, the turnout for the same number of NCs was 21,647. Turnout increased this year by 5%.

- Nearly three-quarters of all voters (74.5%) were NC residents. Nine percent of voters identified as Community Interest Stakeholders
- The median voter turnout was 168. The highest voter turnout was for the Venice NC, with 1,729 voters. The lowest voter was for Olympic Park with 22 voters

Election Challenges

Forty-eight election challenges were filed for 22 NC elections. The City Clerk affirmed 11 of these challenges and the remaining challenges were dismissed or withdrawn. The top three types of challenges included:

- Electioneering
- Illegal voting
- Use of NC funds on Outreach materials to endorse candidate or slate of candidates

Post-Election Feedback

In late July/early August 2019, DONE and the City Clerk hosted a series of feedback sessions to obtain input on how the NC election process can be improved. Although not comprehensive of every issue affecting NC elections, the City Clerk was able to identify several areas of concern that our office can address now before the next set of elections. These included:

- Election timelines and schedules
- More Clerk staff presence at NC Board Meetings
- Election Day operations
 - Improved maps
 - Refined boundary definitions
- Election challenge procedures
- Alternative Voting methods such as online voting and Vote-By-Mail

Community Interest Stakeholder Definition

In December 2018, the Health, Education and Neighborhood Councils Committee approved a series of reforms to the NC System. At that time, it was too late to implement the reforms for the 2019 Cycle, however, the City Clerk is committed to incorporating these reforms into future election processes. Most notable among these reforms was a clarification of how a "community interest stakeholder" is defined.

Originally, a community interest stakeholder was defined as one who affirms a substantial and ongoing participation within the NC's boundaries and who may be in a community organization such as, but not limited to, educational, non-profit or religious organizations. Under the new Committee reforms, a community interest stakeholder has been redefined to be someone who participate in, or is a member of, a community organization, defined as a named entity, which has a physical street address within the boundaries of the NC for not less than one year prior to the NC election or selection which performs verifiable ongoing activities and operations that confers some benefit on the community. This may include, but is not limited to, Chambers of Commerce, houses of worship or other faith-based organizations, educational institutions, non-profit organizations or other such community based organizations.

NC's are, however, allowed to expand this definition by amending their bylaws to include other defined groups of stakeholders to meet their specific needs. Therefore, it may continue to create confusion and further increase the workload as staff are determining eligibility requirements for each of 99 NCs.

Alternative Voting Options

In 2016, 35 NCs participated in an online voting pilot project. In 2018, the City Council approved a second pilot online election for 10 NCs as part of the 2019 NC Elections. This pilot project was initiated to assess the viability, safety, and impact of online voting as an alternative method for voting in future NC elections. Unfortunately, after an assessment by the City Clerk and the online voting vendor, Everyone Counts, Inc. (which later became Votem Corp.), it was determined that a pilot project was not feasible for the 2019 NC Elections. The pilot was cancelled in November 2018 and the participating NCs were reincorporated into the regular election schedule. Since then, Votem has informed us that it can no longer provide the type of online voting option required for NC elections. As of this date, there is no other viable online voting option available for NC elections. Until an option is fully vetted and reviewed, the City Clerk does not recommend an online voting option for the 2021 NC Elections.

However, the City should consider offering a Vote-By-Mail option (additional cost) to all NCs for the 2021 NC Elections. A Vote-By-Mail option would allow stakeholders who are otherwise eligible to vote but are unable to go to the polls on Election Day to cast a ballot. This would provide a useful option to NCs with a large number of voters with disabilities or with religious commitments that may prevent them from voting at the polls.

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CONCLUSION

The City Clerk is committed to providing excellent service to the stakeholders of the City of Los Angeles. Our office continues to welcome feedback that will assist us in achieving positive results in future elections.

Sincerely,



Holly L. Wolcott
City Clerk

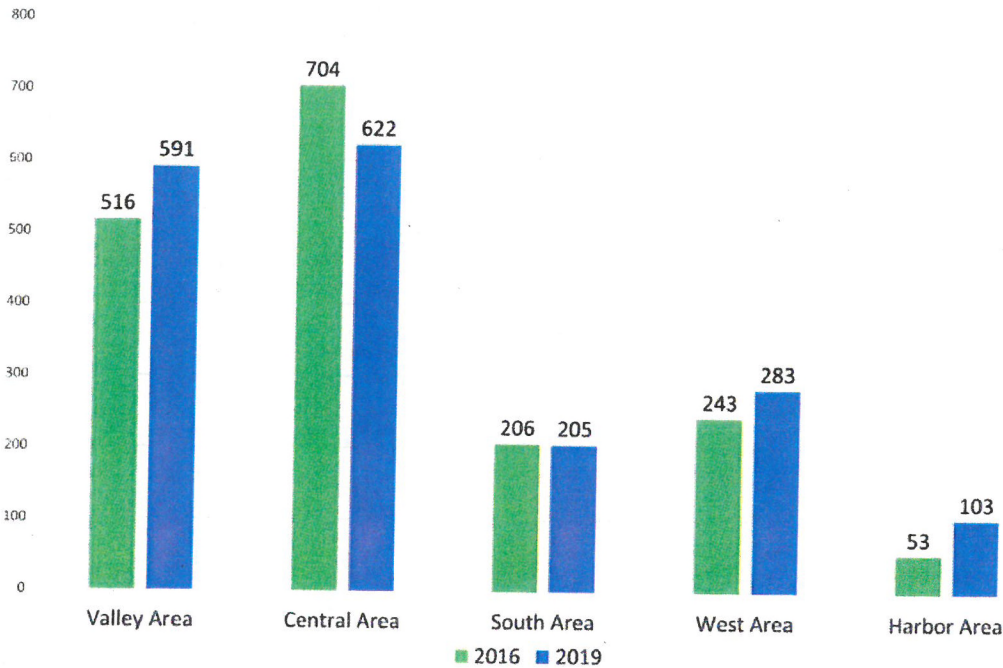
Attachment - Exhibit 1

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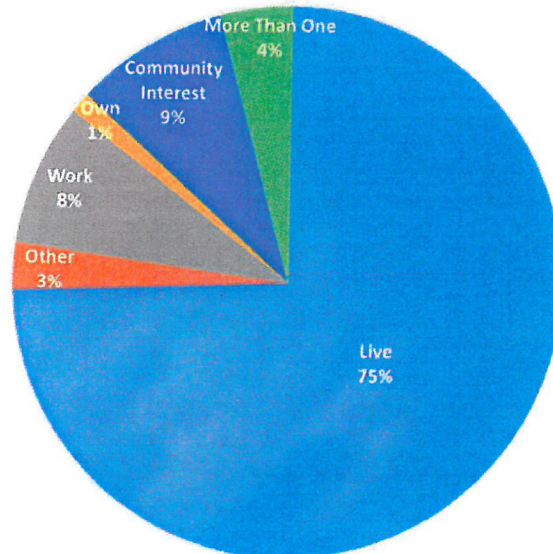
2019 Neighborhood Council Elections Candidate and Voter Breakdown

Number of Certified Candidates
2016 vs 2019



Certified Candidates	Amount
2016 Total Candidates	1,722
2019 Total Candidates	1,804

Voter Turnout by Stakeholder Status



Area-Wide Stakeholder Status	
Type	Number
Live	16,928
Work	1,899
Own	276
Community Interest	2,052
Other	623
More Than One	950
Total	22,728