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March 21, 2012

Honorable Members of the  
Los Angeles City Council  
Room 360, City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Members,

We, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (Commission), write to express our concern about a certain provision contained in a proposed ordinance addressing Neighborhood Council (NC) elections (Council File No. 11-1912). While we laud the City of Los Angeles' (City) commitment and efforts to ensuring that NC elections are conducted in a timely and fair manner, we are deeply concerned with a provision within the proposed ordinance that would allow NC's to opt out of conducting any elections until 2014.

The Commission believes that any minor cost savings that could be realized by allowing NC's to opt out of conducting timely elections would not justify the damaging consequences. The current proposal envisions that NC elections will be conducted on a regional level that would cover multiple NC's with each election. Thus, any cost savings realized by allowing one or two NC's to not participate in regional elections that are being conducted regardless of their participation would be minimal.

The consequences, however, are potentially substantial. If the City were to allow NC boards to decide for themselves whether to hold an election for their seats, the City would essentially be creating a mechanism for self-interest to circumvent the democratic process. The uneven application of democratic elections within the NC system would not only disenfranchise affected stakeholders, it would impugn the integrity of the entire NC system.

Short of conducting an election-style vote of neighborhood stakeholders, we cannot think of a reliable means of certifying and confirming that a decision to postpone an election is the will of the stakeholders rather than the will of the NC board members. And holding an "election" to decide whether to conduct an election does not make sense. Thus, there are no reasonable means for implementing a fair opt-out option.

Allowing NC's to opt-out of elections is bad policy. Therefore, we strongly urge the City Council to not include an opt-out option in the ordinance.

Sincerely,

Daniel Gatica, President  
Board of Neighborhood Commissioners