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**RAQUEL BELTRÁN**  
GENERAL MANAGER

February 28, 2022

**Honorable John Lee, Chairperson**

Honorable Members of the Arts, Parks, Health, Education, and Neighborhoods Committee

**Honorable Paul Krekorian, Chairperson**

Honorable Members of the Budget and Finance Committee

c/o Office of the City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall

200 N Spring St

Los Angeles, CA 90012

**CC:** Mayor Eric Garcetti, Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council, Reseda Neighborhood Council, Arroyo Seco Neighborhood Council, East Hollywood Neighborhood Council, Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council, Echo Park Neighborhood Council, Rampart Village Neighborhood Council, Mid City Neighborhood Council, Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council, and Encino Neighborhood Council.

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENTS, COUNCIL FILE 20-0963**

**BACKGROUND:**

On January 18, 2022, the Reseda Neighborhood Council submitted a Community Impact Statement (CIS) to [Council File 20-0963](#), pertaining to the 2020-2021 Neighborhood Council (NC) elections. The CIS comments on how the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment spent and managed funds allocated to engagement efforts promoting 2020-2021 NC elections and general NC awareness.

Below is the Department's response to the CIS from Reseda NC, which has been supported and reissued with little to no amendment by several other neighborhood councils.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Note and file this report.

**SUMMARY:**

The Department's response is aligned with five (5) broad areas/requests addressed in Reseda NC's CIS. They are addressed in the details of the report below:

1. Accounting of money spent and remaining
2. Details on how and why vendors were selected
3. Copies of vendor social media reports
4. Details re: fulfillment of vendor contracts and outcomes
5. Answers re: use and amount of engagement funds remaining

Throughout this CIS, reservation is expressed as to whether the Department had ever shared the requested information publicly. With limited exception, all of the material gathered here has been publicly shared on multiple occasions and on multiple channels, in emails, NC reports, Commission meetings, and election feedback sessions over the course of the past year or more. For that reason, details on when and how requested info was previously shared with NCs or the public are included throughout this report.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

No fiscal impact with this report

Thank you for your review and consideration of the enclosed report. We are always available to answer questions and glad to provide any further information requested.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raquel Beltrán". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline under the name "Beltrán".

Raquel Beltrán,

GMB

## **EmpowerLA Response to Community Impact Statements** **Council File 20-0963**

### **RESPONSES TO THE 5 MAIN REQUESTS IN THE RESEDA CIS**

#### **Request 1: “Full accounting of money spent and money remaining” (p.2)**

The Department has created a public Google Drive folder with the documents requested in the CIS. It has been available since **February 1, 2022** as part of our report to the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners following the January 11, 2022 APHEN meeting. The drive offers a full accounting of NC engagement efforts funded by the \$456,000 allocated to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment at the start of the 2020-2021 NC election season:

<https://tiny.cc/2021NCElectionReportDocs>

That folder includes vendor closing summaries; a list of all contracts and Authorities for Expenditures (AFEs) associated with these funds; and copies of the Department’s original Awareness, Engagement, and Election Strategy Plan (ESP) from October 2020; as well as the Department’s January 2022 reports to the City Council and the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners on NC elections and awareness engagement efforts.

By the time Reseda NC took action on this CIS on January 18, 2022, the Department had already given a “full accounting of money spent and money remaining” in our [post-elections outreach report to the City Council](#), presented to the Arts, Parks, Health, Education, and Neighborhoods (APHEN) Committee on January 11, 2022. This report was shared with NC members and other DONE newsletter subscribers in the [Department’s January 7 newsletter](#), along with an invite to attend the City Council presentation on January 11.

Engagement and elections outreach expenditures were also discussed in detail at a total of 6 public meetings – the January 11 APHEN meeting, as well as the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners [NC Election Town Hall \(August 31, 2021\)](#), and the 4 Post-Election Feedback Sessions held in August - September 2021. Reseda NC members Jamie York, Noelle Eagle, Sharon Brewer, and Maria Skelton [RSVPed for the August 23rd session](#), and Ms. York even submitted an advance question. All subscribers received the session followup packet afterwards, even if they did not attend the live sessions.

#### **Request 2 - “Full accounting of how and why vendors were selected” (p.2)**

The Department gave a detailed accounting of the type of vendors we hoped to hire for the election season and the work we envisioned them doing in our Awareness, Engagement, and [Election Strategy Plan](#) (ESP), which has been publicly shared since October 21, 2020 - see the chart on pages 2 - 8 of that Plan.

The ESP was presented at Board of Neighborhood Commissioner meetings at the start of the election season. It was also the centerpiece of the Department's presentation at the four regional sessions the Department hosted for NC members, to talk about outreach plans for the 2020-2021 elections. These were held in January 2021; Reseda NC was invited to the regional session for their part of the Valley on January 6, 2021.

Whether they were able to attend the live session or not, every NC member invited received a [regional elections outreach resources packet](#) by email afterwards, which included an overview of and link to the Election Strategy Plan on page 2. Every NC holding an election also received a copy of this summary which lists the election outreach support offered by the Department during the 2020-2021 season: <http://tiny.cc/2021NCElectionResources>

The ESP plan was also part of what was covered in the 1-on-1 election outreach strategy sessions the Department offered to each of the 91 NCs holding an election last season. Altogether, [71 NCs accepted the invite for one of these 1-on-1 election strategy sessions](#). Reseda NC board members attended a 1-on-1 elections meeting with Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate Vanessa Serrano and City Clerk's Nathan Singh on January 19, 2021, to develop an elections outreach strategy. [The notes from that meeting are here](#).

At both regional and one-on-one sessions, we gave "a full accounting of how and why vendors were selected" or would be selected for the election season. We explained at that time that CBO partners were being chosen based on the extent and strength of their existing relationships in regions where we expected to have a harder time recruiting candidates and turning out voters. We also explained that vendors and partners were being asked to partner on the election outreach process in general, and not with individual NCs in particular, as some NC members had hoped the Department would have the bandwidth to broker organizational partnerships for individual NCs.

### **Request 3 - "Copy of vendors' social media analytics report" (p.2)**

This material is available in the Vendor + Partner Reports section of this Google Drive folder, which contains support docs from the February 1 Commission presentation on awareness, elections, and engagement expenditures:

<http://tiny.cc/2021NCElectionReportDocs>

Additionally, social media analytics from our digital marketing vendor, updates on CBOs that included info on social media posts, and reports on the Department's organic social media engagement efforts were all shared in interim reports to the Commission during the election season. A summary of social media results was shared at the 4 post election feedback sessions in August and September 2021, and at the Commission's August 31 town hall. Social media results summaries were also shared in the [Department's post-elections report to APHEN](#) (see pp. 5-6), which was released January 6 and presented to APHEN January 11, one week before this CIS asking for those social media analytics was discussed and passed by Reseda NC.

#### **Request 4 - Details re: fulfillment of vendor contracts and outcomes**

In their CIS, Reseda NC asks that “contractual obligations that were not independently verifiable by the neighborhood council be reviewed for their fulfillment and the outcome be shared with all neighborhood councils and the City Council” (p.2).

Reseda NC’s CIS looks at contracts and Authority for Expenditures (AFEs) for 7 engagement vendors and partners, and requests details of the work done by each. That information appears in the vendor overviews section below.

#### **Request 5 - Answers re: use and amount of engagement funds remaining**

Reseda NC alleges that the Department was not transparent about not spending all the funds and why and alleges there are funds unaccounted for.

“Lastly, while \$456,000 was requested and allocated for the 2021 election, we do not believe nearly that amount was spent based on receipts filed with the controller’s office. There is a minimum of \$150,000 that appears to have been left unspent based on current filings. Payments for outreach to the unhoused and youth that were detailed in the justification budget appear to have not been spent. The Reseda Neighborhood Council would like to inquire why. We would also like to inquire where these funds will be used moving forward” (pp. 5-6).

Here are the several steps taken by the Department to be transparent with NCs, City decision makers, those who have oversight over neighborhood councils, and the public about plans to use the engagement funding provided in November 2020:

- **Getting Mayoral and City Council approval for rollover funds**  
We sought and received the approval of the City Council to roll over some of the funds received for awareness, engagement, and election outreach for continued use in awareness outreach efforts. A total of \$57,891.37 in rollover funds was approved by the City Council on December 8, 2021 and approved by Mayor Garcetti on December 11. See [Council File 21-1409](#).
- **Notices to NCs and to the public**  
In addition, on at least 16 different occasions, in public discussions and messages to NCs, the Department talked openly about our plan to use some of the election outreach funds to conduct general NC awareness and engagement efforts, after elections ended.

Updates on NC awareness efforts were shared in 8 Monthly Updates to board members sent between June 2021 - January 2022. Info on these efforts was also shared at 8

public meetings: the 4 election feedback sessions; the Commission town hall; and 3 regular Commission meetings from May - June 2021. This [presentation from mid-June 2021](#), for example, lays out awareness plans in some detail.

- **Why transitioning engagement plans from elections to awareness is sound practice from a City contracting perspective**

Shifting the focus of engagement efforts from NC elections to NC awareness in response to changing circumstances is actually good stewardship, according to established City contract guidelines.

Reseda NC's CIS examines contracts for 3 vendors in close detail: Evitarus, Altamed, and Central City Neighborhood Partners (CCNP).

In Attachment A of each of these contracts, Standard Provisions for City Contracts, there appears the following provision PSC-6 on Excusable Delays. It reads:

“Neither party shall be liable for its delay or failure to perform any obligation under and in accordance with this Contract, if the delay or failure arises out of fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, quarantine restrictions, other natural occurrences, strikes, lockouts (other than a lockout by the party or any of the party's Subcontractors), freight embargoes, terrorist acts, insurrections or other civil disturbances, or other similar events to those described above, but in each case the delay or failure to perform must be beyond the control and without any fault or negligence of the party delayed or failing to perform (these events are referred to in this provision as ‘Force Majeure Events’)” *[emphasis added]*.

Provision PSC-6 concludes:

“In the event CONTRACTOR’S delay or failure to perform arises out of a Force Majeure Event, CONTRACTOR agrees to use commercially reasonable best efforts to obtain the goods or services from other sources, and to otherwise mitigate the damages and reduce the delay caused by the Force Majeure Event.”

In other words, Force Majeure Events like the pandemic, the quarantine, or the January 6 insurrection may delay enacting contracts for time sensitive events like elections, or impact the ability to perform work as envisioned in the original scope of work.

In this case, provision PSC-6 advises that contractors — and by extension, the Departments working with them — should do their best to pivot and deliver whatever services offer the best solutions and alternatives at that time. This best practice is built into the City’s standard contracts boilerplate, to ensure that work being performed on the City’s behalf stays in motion and stays focused on services delivery as much as possible, while retaining the flexibility and decision-making capacity to be responsive to the situation at hand.

This means that staying focused on delivering NC engagement by pivoting from elections to awareness as delays pushed plans past election deadlines was not an abuse of City contracts. Instead, this pivot is in line with general City guidelines for the execution of contracts and Authority for Expenditures (AFEs) such as those established with the other vendors the Reseda CIS examines.

- **Why a fund rollover for NC awareness efforts makes sense for a non-election year**  
Reseda NC had asked why the full amount allocated to NC engagement efforts was not yet spent. The timing of NC awareness efforts is a factor here. Even if the pandemic had not disrupted the contracting process and delayed engagement plans, the Department still would have asked to carry over some of the outreach funding allocated at the start of the 2020-2021 election season for use on post-elections awareness campaigns to be carried out during late 2021 and early 2022, before the 2022-2023 election cycle starts.

There are two reasons for this: first, funding has never yet been provided to promote NC engagement efforts in a non-election year, and second, awareness efforts can be carried out most cost-effectively when elections are not active. This is because elections messaging is time sensitive, and the best messaging is targeted at the level of an individual NC because each NC has unique election participation rules, which can be complex to explain.

By contrast, awareness messaging is evergreen, and simple. The same awareness message can be shared Citywide, which lowers the cost per engagement of ad buys. For that reason, it makes sense to conduct awareness campaigns when the elections are not in season, which is why money was saved for awareness engagement during the off-year. This is discussed in greater detail in our [January 11 APHEN report](#).

## **VENDOR OVERVIEW:**

### **Clarifying vendor roles**

The Election Strategy Plan centered on awareness, engagement, **and** election outreach.

With the exception of social research firm Evitarus, all partners mentioned in the CIS are community-based organizations (CBOs) serving areas with high levels of economic and social disparity. All but DangerMan serve communities in South, Central, and East LA, about 45 minutes to an hour across town from Reseda, which the NC website bills as the “hub of the West Valley.”

One possible source of questions about vendors may arise from a misunderstanding about what their primary duties were. There are several references to “digital media,” for example, where it seems that “digital media” is being used as if it were synonymous with “social media.” But social

media is just one type of digital media, which also includes channels like email newsletters, YouTube videos, or websites. Because of this, some CBO efforts may have been examined too narrowly.

In addition, there is an assumption that using digital tools like social media was a primary duty for every Department partner. While paid and organic social media is a primary engagement strategy for both NC elections and awareness efforts overall, not every partner was asked to focus their attention there - particularly if they serve an area heavily impacted by the digital divide.

As our [chart of the relationship between NC voter turnout and the percentage of local households with internet access](#) shows, the West Valley has one of the highest percentages of digitally enfranchised households. Reseda – where 88% of households have internet access – is no exception.

By contrast, neighborhoods served by the CBOs examined in this CIS are mostly clustered toward the bottom end of that chart, where only 70 - 75% of households have internet.

For that reason, CBOs serving communities with lower rates of internet access often foregrounded non-digital engagement strategies like flyering, tabling, or door knocking to share NC info.

The overview below of the assignments and results for each vendor named in the CIS will summarize the core expectations for each one.

### **DangerMan**

DangerMan the Urban Superhero is a youth educator and advocate based in the North Hollywood, Van Nuys, and Studio City area. He distributed nearly 1,000 English/Spanish flyers promoting NCs to youth and adults in these neighborhoods, going door-to-door to residences and businesses and placing them in the hands of passersby. His term of service was July - August 2021, after the elections had ended and engagement efforts had turned toward NC awareness, so he was asked to share flyers that said, “Get Involved With Your NC,” which explained what NCs do and how to learn more.

DangerMan’s nonprofit - described as the “only Black-owned and operated superhero brand in the world - has a particular focus on youth programs with initiatives like “Books Not Bullets.” Contrary to what was stated in the CIS, school age Angelenos can and do participate directly in NC elections, as candidates and voters for any NC that has a Youth Seat. In addition, sharing flyers with school age youth as a way of getting NC info to their parents and their households was a suggestion which NC members had made at feedback sessions for the 2019 NC elections. For these reasons, DangerMan was recommended by a large Valley community

services provider to be an NC outreach partner, because he could reach individuals within the targeted areas with concrete bilingual NC messaging.

### **LA County African American Employees Association**

The LA County African American Employees Association has a mailing list of over 1,000 civically minded individuals in the greater LA area. One of their main roles was to send email newsletters to this group, and share NC info, which they did weekly for two months, from mid-July to mid-September 2021. Their newsletter has an average open rate of 87%. They also followed up with phone calls to some members, where needed. Several individuals who heard about NC opportunities through their efforts expressed an interest in joining NC boards or committees and were referred to the Department for follow up.

### **All People's**

As All People's noted in their [closing report](#), the South Central-area Spanish-speaking community they work with is digitally underserved, so they focused on doing in-person outreach as possible. They distributed election materials to 100 of their local clients; handed out election flyers to about 300 other in-person contacts; and helped 24 voters with ballot applications. Additionally, they shared NC info at a virtual event for women's support group M.E.J.O.R.

All People's also shared info about the importance of NCs with their staff, so that staff could help engage community members they worked with in their local communities.

### **KYCC**

Koreatown Youth + Community Center (KYCC) mostly used [concrete, face-to-face strategies](#) to reach their digitally underserved community. Their efforts included door knocking to over 200 households in their service area, to share info in Spanish and English about NC elections. They also shared NC info at their tree giveaway tabling events, and did an NC 101 presentation to the Chesterfield Square Block Club.

KYCC spans many NCs, but focused their efforts during this campaign on NCs in Council Districts 8 and 9 like Empowerment Congress Central, Empowerment Congress Southeast, and Voices.

### **Evitarus**

The analysis of the [Evitarus contract](#) misconstrues the role that surveys play in public engagement. Data gathered in a survey can inform the creation of both Citywide and microtargeted engagement messaging. But surveys are not really primary engagement tools

themselves, in the way that handbills or email newsletters are. Instead, the data gathered and analyzed through Evitarus' expert polling and data assessment services is what underwrites voter engagement. There is not a need for their firm to be voter engagement specialists, but there is a need for them to have expertise in gathering and understanding public data.

The Department and NCs themselves, as well as other partners like CBOs who have expertise on the communities served, will then use the Evitarus survey data to develop and inform engagement efforts that effectively microtarget the audiences the survey helps to identify.

Execution of the Evitarus contract was delayed first by pandemic-related delay in allocation of engagement funding, and then by review processes within the offices of the City Attorney and the City Administrative Officer (CAO). Given their concerns about this contract, Reseda NC may be glad to learn that this contract was delayed mostly because these offices wanted to make sure that the value this vendor could deliver was proportionate to their contracted terms and amount.

Reseda NC alleges that the “contract was likely unfulfilled” with social research firm Evitarus. However, Evitarus carried out their NC survey from October - December 2021, closing it on December 31, 2021. Their contract was approved by the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners on March 15, 2021. The contract included an amendment to the scope of work to be the administration of a survey to poll Angelenos about their awareness and engagement with neighborhood councils.

Many notices about the survey and invites to take it were shared with the public and with NCs. The Evitarus contract status and survey were routinely discussed by General Manager Beltrán in GM Reports at Board of Neighborhood Commissioners meetings between November 2020 and November 2021: about 20 meetings altogether, since the Commission meets twice monthly.

In addition, every NC member received at least 7 direct messages about the Evitarus survey, while it was open. They were emailed a link to take the survey, and also received 3 Monthly Updates (which are a customized status report sent to NC leaders) and 3 Department newsletters that all contained survey news. See for example this November 5 newsletter, sent with the subject line, “Take Our Neighborhood Council Awareness Survey:” <https://conta.cc/3nZXP0I>.

The survey was the lead image on the Department’s homepage at <http://EmpowerLA.org> throughout November and December 2021. Survey invites were also shared by the Mayor’s Area Representatives and on the Department’s Nextdoor account and other social media channels.

A total of 8,563 responses were received to the Evitarus NC Awareness and Engagement survey; 6,833 of these responses were complete. How many responses can reasonably be expected when a Citywide survey is conducted by a large metropolitan California city? One comparison is the City of San Francisco's annual survey of residents, which was offered in five

languages. San Francisco received 2,218 complete responses to their survey that year, which was conducted both online and by phone. This annual survey is familiar to many SF residents, so that trust factor gives it a good response rate. The Evitarus NC Awareness and Engagement survey compares well to these results.

### **Altamed**

Altamed was only [tasked with reaching 5 specific NCs](#): Westlake North, Boyle Heights, Watts, MacArthur Park, and East Hollywood. Our instructions to them specified who to target for general awareness vs election-specific outreach, due to the timing of their contract, which was not enacted until April 9, 2021

Altamed was especially chosen for their substantial connection to the targeted community of interest in the election strategy plan, particularly their presence in central, south, and east LA City. They did posters with QR codes advertising elections in their clinics, and they had Civic Engagement Coordinator staff ready to answer any questions from those receiving their election newsletters (see this [sample newsletter article](#).) Their print outreach at their clinics earned [13,541 impressions](#), exceeding the goal of 10,000 set in their [contract](#) (p.37) by over 35%. And they included NC info in their English/Spanish “My Vote, My Health” [print newsletter mailed to 12,806 households](#) within the targeted NC areas.

In addition to the above, Altamed did 32 social media posts to promote NC elections and awareness. Altamed earned over [104,000 impressions](#) on their NC social media posts - nearly 3.5 times the stated goal of 30,000 impressions set forth in their [contract](#) (p. 37).

None of the Altamed social media posts that RNC highlighted were for NCs on their actual assignment list. Altamed took on these extra posts voluntarily, to try to assist in areas where they thought they had some reach. They had not been prepped on NCs other than their assigned NCs, before they launched their campaign, so they did not have the same familiarity with NCs that were not on their assignment list.

However, any and all election posts done by Altamed shared the link to the official voter info webpage. Those visiting the page were prompted to search for their NC by address if they did not already know it, and the search results would pull up their correct elections info. So anyone who clicked the link in one of these posts would still ultimately be connected to the right info for their correct NC.

### **CCNP**

Westlake North NC had their first election in 8 years (since 2014) and Westlake South their first election in a [decade](#) (since 2012), thanks to efforts by partners in their area like Altamed and Central City Neighborhood Partners (CCNP).

CCNP did outreach in Spanish and Quiche to areas served by Westlake North, Westlake South, Rampart Village, and Pico Union NCs.

The Reseda CIS states that CCNP did a total of 2 election posts on social media, but CCNP actually did a total of [45 NC-related social media posts](#): more than double the [contracted number of 21 social media posts](#) (p. 4).

While only 5 of these posts were elections-related, this is because their [contract](#) was not enacted until March 22, 2021. This was just one week before Rampart Village NC's election ended March 30, and after elections for the other 3 NCs CCNP was asked to do engagement for had already closed.

This timeline is why the bulk of CCNP's posts are intended to build awareness and encourage participation, rather than promote elections. For example, they share NC board meeting Zoom links; vacancy notices for Westlake South, who still had some open board seats post-elections; or links to NC sustainability events or other workshops.

CCNP also sent 8 newsletters to their mailing list of 3,200 people, promoting NCs in general, as well as individual NCs in particular. These newsletters had an average open rate of about 30%.

They also phone banked; tabled with NC info at 4 in-person events; and helped NC stakeholders over the phone who needed assistance gaining access to virtual NC meetings and agendas.

In their [closing report](#), CCNP noted the struggle non-English speakers had trying to get NC info and attend meetings, which were often conducted in English, as a barrier to participation which could be addressed by the Department and by NCs.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Reseda NC writes, "It is noted that while awareness of the neighborhood council meetings is welcome, this does not promote participation in elections" (p.5). But in fact, awareness is the pathway for election engagement. Someone who has been to an NC meeting is more invested in the NC and has a greater idea of its value. This in turn makes them more likely to run or vote when elections come. On a practical level, someone who is already receiving NC meeting notices or attending meetings is more likely to receive or hear elections info.

Awareness efforts are key to getting stakeholders added to the pipeline for NC communications and connected to that network, so they participate in their NCs all year round, and not just during the election season.