

Topic: Planning Pilot meeting I

Date/Location: 10/14/2006 at DWP

Observer: Mark Elliot/Neighborhood Participation Project

This meeting is an outgrowth of the memorandum of understanding meetings under the Partnership Task Force and the first pilot program meeting with the Department of City Planning. The purpose of the meeting is to describe the pilot program effort, present to participants the ten points agreed upon at the last MOU meeting, and discuss how to proceed in the pilot program using the document as a foundation. The department did commit to appointing a full-time liaison to better open NC-department communication and increase department responsiveness, but at the same time, participants agreed that it should be a neighborhood responsibility to advocate for funding for the department for their efforts.

A theme was the neighborhoods' responsibility with respect to the department. "Gail is willing to make sure you're notified earlier – and better – but what do you need to do to accomplish your goals? It's your obligation, and it's internal – we are not going to tell you what you need to do." Discussion concerned practices to keep the department informed, such as making sure to establish a centralized address for hardcopy notices; email communication to ensure that the board and committee are kept apprized; and most importantly keeping planning up to date with respect to NC contact/point people.

Robert noted difficulties concerning application filing and notification. Participants also complained of applications being filed in the Valley for Westside-area projects, a tactic, some suggested, to tamp down community involvement. Changes in the application also seemed to be a tactic. There is the possibility of changes in the application, Robert said, and they may remain under the radar if they do not require additional discretionary actions. Building and Safety, he noted, needs only to sign-off. "Planning may not even be aware of the changes," Robert said, and suggested establishing a condition in the application to notify upon changes. "Insist on a condition," Jacque added.

Robert noted that sometimes applicants are unaware that they are dealing with a planning issue. "Beer and wine licenses may require a conditional use permit, or an establishment may need rezoning for manufacturing." This is also a political issue to be worked out with the council offices: discretionary action may be required, but NCs have special standing, in contrast to other community groups. "We're talking agency-agency agreements here," Robert said. "Gail has agreed to get you a copy of the application, the EIR, the findings and graphics – the complete packet. You'll get notice well before the city processes it (as a completed application)." Planning, Robert said, has no plans to notice in adjacent areas beyond already-mandated notices. Russell Brown suggested that each NC could look at the CNC report for adjoining projects.

Another area of discussion concerned NC decisions or non-action on proposed projects, and how NC official positions (or lack thereof) affected decision-making. "Gail assumes 'no position' unless she hears otherwise," Robert said, adding, "You can 1) submit information to the application in writing or 2) show up with your NCs position,

which the ZA will take it under advisement if you are working with the applicant. But if you don't respond – that's it." One participant asked, "Should NCs be obligated to show that they made an effort? Could they oppose a project without communicating with the applicant – without giving the applicant an opportunity to present the project?" Another participant responded that the NC could not in good faith oppose a project without communicating with the applicant. "If you've not had a public hearing?" Brady said they could not articulate an official position if there has not been board action. Russell Brown, referring to associations that complain that they get wind of something before the hearing and then protest it, asked, "Does this give NCs, which are disorganized, an opportunity to just show up to block it [in lieu of action]?" Robert responded that in light of effective notice, "The 'didn't know' excuse goes away." Robert said that the decision-maker will take such issues into account.

Several participants asked for advisory resources from Planning for particular land use issues, but Robert suggested that resource constraints prohibited it. An area for NC input into the department's process, Robert said, concerns agenda items that may give the department a heads-up to what's being considered in the neighborhoods. "Planning can look at your agenda if they receive it early enough (one week ahead) and say, 'It's an issue that we are considering,' or 'We don't have the people to handle that.' They can give us feedback – but not advise – as we are an integral part of the planning process." He added, "Planning will work on educating the task force because Gail believes in training" (as was undertaken in San Diego). Robert said that Gail agreed to have the department develop guidelines for NCs to become more effective in participating and to understand how Planning uses public input. "Your best single resource is your representative: say to your council person, 'Get someone to our meetings,' or call their planning deputy."

Discussion then moved on from the "ten modified points" document to an information exchange. Discussed were:

- The Warner Center's specific plan, which did not incorporate the Woodland Hills-Warner Center NC's proposed ICO, August Steurer said, but did succeed in building into the current plan a funding stream - \$700,000 - for an update.
- Complexity in the new community plan update process, which is considerable, Russell Brown of Hollywood United, said. It is taxing NCs in the Hollywood area;
- De De Audet, Grass Roots Venice, gave an update on the UCLA Project X competition, with the 'YIMBY' – Yes in My Backyard - proposal for second units taking the jury's approval.
- Mary Benson, Foothill Trails, said that equine protections are vanishing and that NC action is needed to stem the automatic conversions of residential accessory zones – "the last rural zoning" -- in favor of multiple smaller lots, which she described as a "concession without a benefit" for communities. She noted that the city was considering nesting equine protections in the Parks element from the transportation element in the General Plan.

- Community plan updates and the praise the process is receiving. Brady said, “They’ll go to every group but come to us first to make us the focal point, and tell us what we need to be thinking about before they even look at the plan.” He added, “It’s a total change in culture at Planning – everything is on the table, from macro to micro issues.”
- Information exchange is important. “How can we take away this knowledge and share it in a proactive way?” Russell Brown asked. “This group can become a library of resources.” Mr. Brown and August Steurer offered specific example of how proactive planning required sustained neighborhood attention – and resources. Others brought neighborhood-specific and citywide issues to the attention of the group.
- NCs and how they system is gaining attention from the Mayor’s office. “The Mayor realizes that we are organized,” Brady said, to which Adrienne O’Niell added, “The Mayor is appointing representatives to attend NC meetings – a step that we haven’t seen.” De De Audet said that the mayor has staff at seven “leadership congresses” in the service areas.

The meeting closed with agreement that organized neighborhoods are having an impact. As Jacque said, “We’re starting to develop some power – and don’t step back.”