

**Topic: Planning MOU Process 5th meeting****Date/Location: 12/3/05 at DWP Bldg, Los Angeles**

**Participants:** 38 NCs were represented, including Downtown Los Angeles, Greater Griffith Park, Hollywood United, MacArthur, Mid City West, Olympic Park, Arroyo Seco, Atwater Village, Boyle Heights, Glassell Park, Lincoln Heights, Silver Lake, Harbor Gateway South, Northwest San Pedro, Granada Hills North, North Hills West, Northridge East, Pacoima, Sun Valley Area, Sylmar, Emp. Cong. South West Area, United Neighborhoods Arlington Hts, W. Adams, Jefferson Pk., Vermont Harbor, CityWatch NC Action Committee, Canoga Park, Encino, Greater Toluca Lake, Mid Town North Hollywood, Tarzana, Van Nuys, West Van Nuys Lake Balboa, Winnetka, Woodland Hills-Warner Center, Bel Air-Beverly Crest, Grass Roots Venice, Mar Vista, West Los Angeles, and Westside. Robert and Jacque Lamishaw facilitated, with Jon Perica offering expertise regarding the Planning Department.

**Observer:** Mark Elliot

---

This meeting is the fifth in the creation of a memorandum of understanding between Los Angeles neighborhood councils and the Department of City Planning. Robert, acting as facilitator, introduced the process to date as “a method to improve communication and to make sure notification is useful – and that’s more than 30 or 60 day notification.” The objective was to allow NCs to “become more involved in the planning process” and to participate in deciding the direction of the City of Los Angeles over the next 20 or so years. “We need to work with Planning,” he said, conferring to NCs the decisions as to what proper timeframes are for notification and input. “You can’t make good decisions without knowledge,” he added, “and there hasn’t been good help” for NCs. “We’re not here to talk about 500 feet notification – it’s a matter of law – but how you get notification. Now you come in late.”

Preliminary questions from the assembled included the uncertainty of a vacant Planning Director chair; whether or not there would be an incentive for Planning or City Council offices to abide by the MOU; and the draft MOU language itself – including when NCs would receive it for comment.

Jon Perica gave a detailed presentation regarding how the public fits into the land use review and planning process generally, and underscored the need for more effective structures of participation – and accountability from the department – than exists today. He offered an overview of the case processing and general planning division functions in the larger context of the hiring freeze and employee reassignments, and the impact this has had on the general planning functions. Regarding case processing, he underscored that “the world isn’t black and white” when it comes to variances, but that zoning administrators appear to make supportable decisions given the circumstances – even if they seem to not comport with the community’s preferences. [Refer to Mr. Perica’s written summary of his remarks for a detailed explanation of existing opportunities for public participation.]

Questions suggested the community’s concern over traffic impacts by addressing the importance of the Planning-DOT communication.

- “DOT and Planning - who has more power? How do you work together?” Jon Perica explained that Planning has the “overall authority,” but that DOT has environmental expertise. Impacts are ‘significant’ or ‘not significant’ and that Planning won’t schedule a hearing until it is determined. But it takes 2-3 months to get a reply, he added. Robert Lamishaw said that NCs “have an impact in that process,” and said that “downstream,” MOUs with DOT and the Bureau of Engineering will “develop a more intelligent transportation approach.”

- “Conditional use and B&Safety enforcement – and operations conditions. Do they drop off the radar? What if they were never done? It’s a constant problem on every single project.” Jon Perica noted that each application has a zoning administrator contact phone number, and that cases remain “subject to review” by the administrator for 1 or 2 years. “But over 5 years? Or if the business owner changes? Planning asks if the site is appropriate, so conditions should continue to protect the community.” Jon suggested that they call the ZA and say, “Something has developed – we need a new condition.”
- “What about cumulative [traffic] impacts? Ninety percent of cases don’t make it into the [discretionary review] process – and the need to update community plans [to reflect new conditions]?” Jon said that Planning must respond to changing patterns of development, to which Robert added, “The issue will be to bring NCs into the process to reflect the concerns of the communities.”
- “Timelines – a large bureaucracy has written timelines, but even if we get a copy, we’re still in the dark, and we can’t protest or take action. How do we get copies of current laws or guidelines and subsequent amendments?” Another questioner added, “I’m tired of playing catch-up – it’s vital that we have early notification of what is happening in the basic planning process, and access to what is going on that will affect us later.”

Also discussed were issues that were beyond the scope of this MOU, including inclusionary housing policies. One questioner noted that giving incentive to developers to come to NCs to make presentations is important. “I’d like to see that incorporated into an agreement.”

Procedurally, it was decided to keep the next meeting small to define how best to proceed on the MOU language, but there was a call for planning deputies from City Council offices to be present – particularly regarding departmental budgetary concerns. “Planning is politically sensitive,” Robert said, “and we have to build support.” He continued, “We have invited all of the Council offices and the Mayor’s office, and later it will be easier to pull these people in. Use your contacts with the Council offices to let them know that this is important.” To which someone added, “So that they’re coming to us – so that we’re not scratching at their door.”

Robert said that the next meeting will look at the MOU itself, and suggested that participants email ideas and/or set up a discussion group to exchange ideas. “This has got to be yours – you have got to buy into it,” he added. “Your stakeholders have got to buy in and then we can get the political support.” He suggested looking at it as a) What can be requested of Planning; and b) “What you have to do as NCs – what are reasonable goals?”