



## Memorandum

To: Planning MOU Task Force

From: Mark Elliot

Date: March 27, 2006

Re: Preliminary results from the survey of land use and committee chairs and designated representatives at the 12/3/2005 Planning MOU task force meeting.

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This December 3, 2005 survey of neighborhood council representatives and delegates to the Planning MOU task force is intended to understand the perspective and experience that volunteers bring to participation in land use and planning matters. Generalizing from the responses is difficult as this is not a representative sample of all neighborhood councils, nor is it a representative sampling of volunteers working in land use in their communities. Participants have self-selected to participate in the task force, so these results should be considered as an overview of volunteers' attitudes.

Of 53 attendees to the Planning Department MOU working group on December 3, 2005, 43 responded to the survey (81%) from a total of 23 identified neighborhood councils. (Six responses specified neither respondent nor neighborhood council.)

As expected, participants in land use matters may feel an investment in their community. Respondents have deep roots: 81% of respondents have lived in their community for ten years or more; 53% have lived in their community for twenty years or more. Thirty-seven percent describe themselves as "very satisfied" with the neighborhood that they live in.

They are also very involved with land use issues in their neighborhood. Fully 46% are land use or planning-related committee chairs and an additional 37% say they are an "active" committee member. If attendance at meetings is an indicator of commitment, 42% say that they have attended a "City planning commission or zoning appeals hearing" in the prior three months.

There is considerable planning knowledge and professional experience brought to their activities in their neighborhood council: 57% report having "professional expertise of value" to their committee work concerning land use, and 37% report "prior experience in planning" or having had "participated in land use matters" in their community in the past.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents who answered agreed with this statement: "We have the technical expertise necessary to evaluate and advise responsibly on proposed projects or planning policies," while two-thirds agreed that they "need additional technical expertise to advise responsibly on proposed projects or planning policies." Just over a quarter of respondents said that they have sufficient resources "such as volunteer time and/or full board support" to advise responsibly on proposed projects or planning policies. More than two-thirds (70%) said they needed additional resources.

Neighborhood councils' representatives to the Planning MOU task force identify land use as a focus of their efforts, and many say that their council has established a dedicated land use committee, with 83% of respondents saying that their council has formed a standing committee "dedicated to planning and land use issues." Five respondents said that land use issues are handled by the full board or a committee other than a standing land use committee, but because not all respondents identified councils – and some councils were represented by more than one respondent – we cannot say for certain how many councils have dedicated land use committees.

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Fifty-four percent of respondents called their neighborhood council's efforts "proactive," meaning the council approaches developers "when we learn that a project application may be filed in our neighborhood council area." Under a third (30%) called their own efforts "reactive" in that they respond to developers' requests "but don't seek presentations to the neighborhood council." Ten percent said that their NC's orientation was somewhere between proactive and reactive. Only one respondent out of 41 responding said that their neighborhood council didn't provide an opportunity for project review

Resource availability from the planning department is not adequate, according to respondents. Only one respondent said that they "receive sufficient technical guidance and/or attention from the Department of City Planning," and there was near unanimous agreement that they need additional technical guidance in order to "advise responsibly on proposed projects or planning policies."

One-quarter of respondents said that the Planning Department's response to "requests from the neighborhood council" has been satisfactory, while just under half (43%) said that the department's response to requests has been "less-than-satisfactory." Five respondents said that their council had not made specific requests. Exactly one-quarter said that they had received technical materials generated by the Department in the past six months, with another quarter saying that they received training from Department planners or staffers in the past six months (respondents could choose both). Almost half (43%) said that they had received neither technical materials nor training from the Planning department.

The capacity to advise is identified by the Charter as a primary responsibility of neighborhood councils, but respondents are not confident that the department incorporates NC or committee input on planning policy. Only two respondents said that they had confidence that the department takes their input into account "all of the time," while just under a third said that the department incorporates NC or committee input "some of the time." Over a third (36% said that they had confidence that the department "almost never" incorporates NC or committee input).

Developer relations are an important aspect of council land use activities. Eighty-eight percent of respondents to the question, "Has a developer (or representatives) appeared before your neighborhood council or one of its committees to solicit community support within the past 45 days," said that a developer had appeared before the neighborhood council in that time. When asked to characterize the way they view such presentations, respondents were evenly divided, with an equal number viewing presentations as "an effort to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution to shared concerns over a project," or "a courtesy call intended to build goodwill but which may or may not result in changes," or that developers viewed presentations as "an obligation [but] unlikely to result in changes to the proposed project." An additional one-third of respondents said that developers' attitudes varied too widely to choose one of the above.

Developer approaches may vary according to the suggestions of the City Council members. Just over half (55%) say that their City Council office "advises" developers to appear, while under a third (30%) report that they believe that their Council Office does not take a particular position. Over half of respondents (57%) said that they were "satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their City Council office's orientation in general regarding land use matters. Exactly one-third said that they were "not at all satisfied" that their City Council office(s) had sufficiently considered community's concerns regarding land use in the past.

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Securing City Council office support for the neighborhood council is important given the limited time of volunteers in the neighborhood council, who are without staff support (unlike the City Council office). When asked how frequently the council office staff works with your neighborhood council to “solicit and incorporate community concerns before a project is presented for planning commission or zoning administrator action,” equal proportions of respondents said the council office “occasionally” or “almost never” works with their committee. Ten percent say their City Council office “almost always” works with their committee.