



WINNETKA NEIGHBORHOOD
COUNCIL
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www.winnetkanc.com



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February 9, 2010

Dear Mayor and All City Council Members:

I am writing in my capacity as a citizen of our City and as President of the Winnetka Neighborhood Council.

As President I am imploring you not to pass the recommendations before your Council to reduce NC funding and sweep NC rolled over funds. I also ask that you take a step back and look at alternatives to reducing the size of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE) or merging DONE with another department.

In terms of funding the NCs are required by the City Charter to be funded adequately. I am sure we can all debate what adequate may be. I can state, as a President, that \$22,500 for most NCs is not adequate. NCs need funds in order to rent office/storage spaces, conduct outreach to stakeholders, generate newsletters, buy equipment such as computer and software and yes undertake community related projects.

In terms of the roll over funds that many NCs have amassed the Council must understand that in many cases we have already allocated that money. Many NCs take on projects that improve their community and those projects often far exceed the \$45,000 annual budget. For example Winnetka is one step away from completing a major beautification project we started years ago with these roll over funds. If those funds are taken from us we will not complete this project and the community will be saddled with a blighted median along Sherman Way.

Please keep in mind that the roll over funds haven't even been audited. Some of the NCs have spent funds (committed and received services from vendors) that have not been paid because of DONE's failure to manage the funds or the process correctly. How can the Council consider sweeping funds that are already spent?

In terms of what to do with DONE my NC has not voted on the issue at this time. However, we would find reducing their workforce to a point where the department (which already functions poorly) would cease to function is not a viable solution. Merging the department with another City department without first fixing the structural, financial, performance, and procedural problems within DONE is also not a viable solution. We would urge the City to take a step back from that proposal and meet with NCs to determine the best course of action. After all DONE, or whatever is left in its place is, by the Charter, supposed to support and assist the NCs.

We all understand the City is in dire straights. We certainly understand that some sacrifices must be made. For too long this City has spent outrageously without planning for the future. The overall economic disaster that continues to impact our country is even more severe here in California. We all understand this. Not one of us wants to see layoffs in place of other solutions unless that is a last resort. Layoffs only hurt people and by the

way only serve to increase the end costs as the City and County social and safety nets still have to cover these people who now have no income. Not one of us wants to see services that for all practical purposes are not existent already, be reduced even further.

However, we would like to point out that the NC system is one of the gems for this City. We are an all volunteer system that can and does provide an insight to the minds of the voters that you were elected to serve. NCs throughout Los Angeles have done some incredible things. We've taken on community improvement projects, often things that the City should have done but hasn't or can't. We've worked to ensure smart development in our neighborhoods. We've worked with our police department to lower crime rates. We've even used our precious funding to buy equipment for our police officers that the City could not or would not provide. We've worked to address quality of life issues, education issues, and emergency preparedness issues. And yes we've been the City's only truly independent watchdog keeping an eye on City departments and bringing up stakeholder concerns about how they operate and run. All of this is what the Charter envisioned and we are all doing it successfully and for only a fraction of what the City would spend it if could.

The proposals before you are nothing short of an effort to take advantage of a very dire situation to gut the NC system. I urge every Council member to think carefully before they cast their vote. Please understand that volunteers need what little funding we have so that we can continue to do all the positive things we've done and plan to do. We need to have resources to reach out and get our communities involved. Volunteers need to be able to see that their time and effort accomplishes something. They need to see that they are making a difference. If you cut our funding, remove what funds we do have, and essentially bury our ability to interact with the City in a meaningful way, then you will really be voting to eliminate the NC system.

Eliminating the system would be huge blow to democracy in our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "JJ Popowich".

JJ Popowich
President, WNC