

Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council



Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council General Meeting

May 14, 2008

Approved by the Board
As Amended 07/09/08

MINUTES

A duly noticed meeting of the Board of Directors of the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council (“GWNC”) was held on Wednesday, May 14, 2008, at the Ebell of Los Angeles, 743 South Lucerne Avenue. President Charles Dougherty called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.

The Secretary, Elizabeth Fuller, called the roll. Board of Directors members in attendance at the roll call were: Yigal Arens, Patti Carroll, Charles Dougherty, Elizabeth Fuller, Jane Gilman, John Gresham, Alison Hannon, Margaret Hudson, Alex Jones-Moreno, Shar Penfold, Mary Rajswing, Martha Schuur, Russell Sherman, Owen Smith, Jane Usher, Robert Wishart and James Wolf. Board Members Moon Chung, Sam Cunningham, and Jolene Snett were absent and not represented by an alternate.

The Secretary stated that a quorum was present.

Featured Presentation

Director Margaret Hudson introduced representatives of the Mid-City West, Pico, Wilshire Center-Koreatown, Olympic Park and Hollywood Studio District Neighborhood Councils, who joined our group for this meeting. Then Director Jane Usher introduced our guest speaker, Los Angeles Director of City Planning Gail Goldberg.

Ms. Goldberg introduced several members of her staff, including the most newly hired planner, Vince Bertoni. Ms. Goldberg said she lives on Rossmore, in the GWNC area, and picked the neighborhood because she enjoys being able to walk to the places she needs to go. She said she’s been in Los Angeles for two years now, and that her move to Los Angeles was a big surprise – she had expected to stay in San Diego – but she’s thrilled to be here. She said there is a lot of potential in Los Angeles, and called it the “last great unfinished American city.”

Ms. Goldberg said that when she arrived here, she was told there was a window of opportunity to introduce “real planning” to the city, which doesn’t have a strong history of planning. Mostly, she said, Los Angeles has been planned project by project...which has resulted in some good projects, but not always great neighborhoods. She also said

that she takes Saturday morning walks with the planners on her staff, so they can see firsthand the areas they're working with. In particular, she said, "we struggle with our commercial corridors" and while we have some great streets, there are some that are "shameful." She also said there are wonderful single family neighborhoods in the city, but people are fearful of losing the character and scale that make them special. Since the City doesn't always connect development with infrastructure, she said, it's "not illogical" that so many people are opposing so many development projects these days.

Ms. Goldberg said the Planning Department had languished in recent years, with few resources, and was trying to handle more projects with half the staff it needed, which was a "recipe for disaster." The first thing the Department needed to do, she said, was "figure out what it wanted to be when it grew up." So the first thing they did was create a strategic plan with four initiatives:

1. Do real planning
2. Build an efficient and effective Department
3. Develop innovative solutions ("one size doesn't fit all")
4. Engage the public (and listen instead of preaching to them)

She said the "very creative" Planning Commission also came up with 14 principles for doing "real planning," including creating walkable cities, design standards, homes for every income level, getting rid of visual blight and other important measures. And they created a work program based on those principles, which is the most comprehensive ever in the City.

Now, she said, the Department is working on the City's General Plan, including two new elements for Housing and Mobility. Department staff are also updating 12 of the City's 35 Community Plans, with more being added as each one is completed, so all 35 Community Plans will be revised in the next few years. And she promised that the new plans will include a lot of specific information, including chapters on transportation, urban design, neighborhood character, infrastructure, public facilities and other important features.

Further, she said they are also working on 10 transit-oriented development plans, and a new policy initiative on urban design principles for the City. Also, she is reorganizing the Department into seven geographical planning teams, so all neighborhoods areas will know which planners are working on issues in their areas. Finally, she said there will also be new communications plans, and the Department has received a small budget increase to support community planning efforts. She said the Mayor and City Council both support community planning because it can change the face of the city.

Moving on to more local topics, Ms. Goldberg said the current planning issues in Larchmont Village are particularly important to the City, because the issues facing that area now will also be faced in many other areas soon. And if we can figure out how to keep serving this community, we'll be able to help many others, too.

Transitions between single family neighborhoods and large buildings are also important right now, she said. We need to create better transitions and minimize the effects of large developments on neighboring houses.

Finally, she said, the Greater Wilshire area is also a laboratory for historic preservation – and that if we can figure it out here, it will give other neighborhoods a much faster start on such issues.

President Charles Dougherty thanked Ms. Goldberg for her remarks and opened the discussion to stakeholder questions and comments, which had been submitted on speaker cards.

Board Alternate Cindy Chvatal asked what good planning does if there's no enforcement of the plans. Ms. Goldberg said services that people think are most important get the best funding, and enforcement tends to fall at the bottom of most people's lists. She said, however, that it's hard to enforce rules if no one knows what they are, so getting good plans in place – with language anyone can understand – is a good place to start. "Good plans will force enforcement."

Ms. Chvatal asked what we can do to get better enforcement of the rules we do have now, but Ms. Goldberg said enforcement is the responsibility of the Department of Building and Safety. She said she believes that Department should have adequate funding to impose fines for violations, but since it's not her department, she has no control over it. Currently, she said, people can't just look at our plans and determine what's allowed and what's not. She said the best thing we can do is create plans that answer those questions up front. "I'm on your side," she said. "I will help you fight for it." Also, she said, we need to come up with money from the City's General Fund to finance the efforts. "In Los Angeles," she said, "It's not about touchdowns; it's about moving the ball down the field."

Stakeholder Allison Sapunor said her neighborhood, Windsor Village, has had an ICO in place since October, 2007, but in March of 2007 a developer applied for a project and the owner was granted approval to reduce the building's setback, which she suspects is a sign that they plan to increase the size of the proposed building. Ms. Sapunor asked Ms. Goldberg how the neighborhood can find out if a proposed project violates its ICO.

Ms. Goldberg said she doesn't know the answer in this specific case, but promised that her staff would research it tomorrow and get back to Ms. Sapunor.

Rich Waters, from the Pico Neighborhood Council, said flawed traffic studies are ruining the quality of life in Los Angeles, and asked why the Planning Department hasn't been more proactive in correcting flawed studies and the decisions that result from them. He said traffic is still gridlocked and each new development makes it worse..and that until this problem is corrected there should be a moratorium on new developments (at least the big ones).

Ms. Goldberg said that each new Community Plan will contain an extensive and complete traffic plan. She agreed that the issue around new developments is a serious one, and that she would like to create a new Traffic Planning function within the DOT. She said they don't currently have a model for such a program, and that they should hire a consultant to address this, because the City needs its own modeling for plans and projects. She also said that the City can't do good plans unless the issue of how people get around is also addressed.

Jim O'Sullivan, from the Miracle Mile Residential Association asked when the City will start doing growth and infrastructure reports, which are currently mandated but which haven't been done on the promised schedule.

Ms. Goldberg said that when resources are taken away from the Department year after year, it's been hard to do those reports. But she said they are creating a "to do" list and are getting up to speed to address this. She said such reports will be part of the new Community Plans.

Mr. O'Sullivan noted that the current Wilshire Community Plan talks about bike paths, walkable cities and curtailing development if it gets out of hand. Ms. Goldberg said that we are going to collect data for this community and that she wants to "connect the dots" between infrastructure and planning. People won't stand for continuing development, she agreed, without the infrastructure to support it. We need to get to the point, she said, where infrastructure is part of our development plans.

Mr. O'Sullivan asked if we are not in violation of the current laws if the mandated reports have not been done, but Ms. Goldberg said we won't know that until we have all the infrastructure information.

[Board Member Alex Jones-Moreno left the meeting, due to a family emergency, at 8:07 p.m.]

Director John Gresham asked if a policy change is due when a house can be torn down illegally and the owner is then granted a permit to build a larger structure on the property.

Ms. Goldberg said yes. She said if the illegally demolished house was historic, they cannot build anything new on the lot. If the house wasn't historic, there's just a fine for the illegal demolition. Part of the whole questions of enforcement, though, is coming up with a system in which fines are not only a deterrent, but also fund enforcement. She said this is on her list of issues to be looked at.

Stakeholder Chickie Byrne asked when a public hearing will be held on the Q conditions on Larchmont Boulevard. Ms. Goldberg said she hopes it will be soon – perhaps within the next 2-3 weeks -- and they will be discussing building height, design issues and other factors.

Stakeholder Roz Strotz, from Windsor Village, asked how neighbors can be kept up to date on the court process for a case involving the property at 751-757 Windsor Blvd. She said the developer was granted a Tentative Tract Map, which was denied on appeal, prompting the owners to sue. Ms. Goldberg said she would do some research on the question and report back.

Stakeholder John McCarthy (from Country Club Park) noted that many R1 homes in the area are being converted to boarding houses, and asked how – after such violations are reported to Building and Safety – the neighbors can follow up to make sure the houses are converted back to their R1 status.

Ms. Goldberg said such conversions are illegal, and that the neighbors do need to report and keep reporting the violations. There are some things the Planning Department can do about the matter, she said, but the most important thing is for the neighbors to be diligent.

Stakeholder Vern Tjarks asked when Ms. Goldberg foresees the enactment of an ordinance restricting hillside construction to control mansionization. Ms. Goldberg said “as soon as possible,” and she hopes it will take less than two years.

Stakeholder Ed Hunt said Melrose Avenue has “huge potential,” but because it’s at the edge of two different Community Plan zones, it’s been neglected. He asked if there are any specific plans in the works for this area, and Ms. Goldberg said she agrees the City can do better on Melrose, and she would be happy to talk more with him about it.

Stakeholder Robbie O’Donnell asked Ms. Goldberg to comment on an electronic billboard district from Western to Normandie on Wilshire Blvd. Ms. Goldberg said she’s not a huge fan of signs, and their proliferation in Los Angeles was startling to her when she moved here. But, she said, the longer she stays here, the more she finds herself blocking them out. She said she does have a lot of concerns about digital signs and the future of signs in the city. Once they go up, she said, it takes “an act of God” to take them down. When asked about the many variances granted for signs, especially in Hollywood, she said the Community Redevelopment Agency often allows sign variances to finance gaps in development projects. She said our Community Plans rule the redevelopment areas, but when they’re too vague, it leaves room for this kind of detail in redevelopment plans. This makes it very important, she said, to take control of the issue with good design guidelines in our Community Plans.

Stakeholder Liz Nankin said we need to be vigilant about billboard proliferation, reported that her teenage daughter doesn’t like to take public transportation that is filled with ads, and asked what we can do about the issue.

Ms. Goldberg said we have to make our voices as loud as we can, and speak up to people like Renee Weitzer, Tom LaBonge’s planning deputy. Ms. Weitzer said that Mr. La Bonge’s office doesn’t support signs, but that signs on MTA vehicles are an MTA

decision, not something the City Council can control. She suggested that concerned citizens write to the Mayor.

Several stakeholders, including Chris Elwell, asked Ms. Goldberg to address strategies for preventing multifamily development in R1 zones. There was also a related question about the chances of down-zoning some R3 properties to R1, with a note that R1 properties are really being “attacked” in our area.

Ms. Goldberg said that there are often R1 homes on R3 lots, and people don’t know that’s the case. She said it’s very important to know what the zoning is, and though we do need to accommodate growth, she is open to moving it around and to moving denser zoning out of areas where it doesn’t feel like it fits in. She said the Planning Department produced a capacity map showing areas with excess capacity and people were horrified because they hadn’t realized all the areas that were zoned for denser development. If the density is inappropriately placed, however, she said we should move it and there is room in the plans to do so.

Mr. Elwell said his question was based on a real, specific situation, and Ms. Goldberg said there is often higher density in the current community plan than in the actual zoning. If that’s the case, developers can come in and go through the process to ask for variances. She said they did 28 zone changes last year, and 25 are consistent with the current plan. She said she’s a big believer in creating a plan and then zoning consistent with the plan...which we don’t have now.

Teresa Feldman, from the Mid-City West Neighborhood Council, asked Ms. Goldberg to address the issue of lot ties, which can lead to “mega”-sized apartment buildings.

Ms. Goldberg said that if the result is a structure out of character with the neighborhood, then we need to address it, and to do so through design guidelines. She also said she would be happy to do some further research on the subject.

Stakeholder Scott McNeely asked if the Transportation and Planning Departments would be combined to facilitate more harmonious planning. Ms. Goldberg said they won’t be combined, but we do need to have a Transportation function that includes enlightened traffic engineers and planners. She said that when she worked in San Diego, they did have a traffic modeling service, which paid for its services by selling them to other departments and agencies. She said she’s working now to find funding for a similar operation here in Los Angeles.

President Charlie Dougherty commented that people worry that the Department of Transportation’s plans will determine what happens with our streets and neighborhoods, and Ms. Goldberg said she’s trying to include transportation in land use plans. She said she’s also been “screaming” when decisions are made about streets without consulting the Planning Department. She said we’re not going to solve traffic issues with streets; we can only solve traffic issues with good land use, and by putting people’s daily needs

within walking distance. If we do that, she said, we would cut traffic, citywide, by at least 10 percent.

Board Member John Gresham, following up on an earlier question about illegal tear-downs, said fining offenders merely increases their cost of doing business. He asked if there are any other kinds of punishments that might be more effective. Ms. Goldberg said this seems to be a wider problem than she thought and she will talk to the City Attorney about it.

Stakeholder Tom Gibbons said the City lacks enforcement on this issue, and that until we get better enforcement, we can't do anything else. Ms. Goldberg agreed, saying that even good planning can't be effective if people don't abide by the rules.

Stakeholder Deborah Cox asked how the Planning Department can stop the development of a BMW dealership that wants to move into two properties on Wilshire Boulevard. CD 4 Planning Deputy Renee Weitzer said this particular project is "by right," so no permits are required, and the C4 zoning of the lots in question do allow the property to be used for an automotive dealership.

Ms. Goldberg agreed, saying car dealerships are allowed under the current Community Plan. Ms. Cox asked how we can get beyond the plan, but Ms. Weitzer said we have to be realistic, and there is commercial zoning on Wilshire. She said the developers originally proposed a different version of the project, which the Council District opposed, but the developer changed its plans and they do now have a by right development.

Ms. Goldberg said the Planning Department is working on creating new types of zones. Current zone definitions are too inclusive, she said, and there needs to be a broader range of zones, with different kinds of commercial areas. So she is working on creating a new kind of "tool box" to deal with this kind of issue.

Board Member Russell Sherman asked about the differences between "Regional Commercial" and "Community Commercial" zones, and where a car dealership would fit in. Ms. Weitzer said Wilshire Boulevard is designated "Regional Commercial" but even if it were "Community Commercial," the car dealership would be allowed. Only "Neighborhood Commercial" would specify density low enough to make a difference, she said.

Patricia Diefendorfer, from the Planning Department, confirmed that "Neighborhood Commercial" is the least dense commercial designation, and that Regional Commercial is much denser.

Stakeholder Judy Reidel asked if solar power can be required on all new buildings and what kinds of incentives homeowners can get to convert to solar power.

Ms. Goldberg said her department is working on that and promised the Planning Department will “up the ante” for green buildings.

Stakeholder Lucille Saunders asked Ms. Goldberg to address SB1818, which grants density bonuses for low income housing units.

Ms. Goldberg said the question is really about the procedural effects of SB1818 and how we communicate the processes. She said she’s been surprised at the misinformation that’s circulating on the issue. She also said she’s “not a huge fan” of the state telling us how to do land use in our area, but that we did come up with an ordinance that did the best job possible, without doing anything procedurally wrong. She said she’d defend SB1818. She also noted that our industrial land use policy is to preserve industrial land, but that we haven’t done it – we have a long history of converting industrial land. She said she has directed her staff to implement the policy, and that if we don’t like the current policies, we should work to change them, and she’ll implement the changes. “I believe that we need to create housing,” she said, “but not at the expense of taking jobs and businesses. And I’m willing to take the flack for that.”

Ms. Saunders asked about community input into the new Housing Element for the General Plan, and Ms. Goldberg said the issue is very simple – it shows what current capacities are, and where there’s capacity is to accommodate more housing. It doesn’t set zoning, just shows what’s there with current zoning. Ms. Saunders asked if they could talk more about this later, and Ms. Goldberg said yes, and that she’s concerned that people haven’t felt like they’ve had a chance to sit down and talk about this.

President Dougherty said there were no other Board comments, thanked Ms. Goldberg, and asked if she’d come back to talk to us again in a couple of years. She agreed, and after Director Margy Hudson thanked the other Neighborhood Councils and the CD4 staff for joining us, Mr. Dougherty called for a short break in the meeting.

[Director Robert Wishart left the meeting at 9:00 p.m.]

Reading of the Minutes

The meeting resumed at 9:12 p.m. and the Secretary read the Minutes of the previous meeting, which had been distributed to Directors by e-mail and posted on the Council’s *greaterwilshire.org* website. Director Margy Hudson asked that the phrase “pushing hard to get all our directors signed up for,” on page 9, be changed to “asking all our directors to sign up.” Director Mary Rajswing asked that, on page 13, the word “in” be struck from the phrase, “the developers did submit their permit applications *in* before the ICO went into effect”...and that, on page 14, “HOPX issues” be changed to “HPOZ issues.” Director John Gresham noted that Director Margaret Hudson’s name was misspelled in the last paragraph on page 7.

The Minutes were approved as amended.

President's Report

President Charles Dougherty was prepared to seat new Citrus Square Director Charles Bergson, and new Brookside Alternate Jan Wieringa, but neither was present, so the action was postponed.

Ad Hoc Traffic Committee

Stakeholder Joan Taylor asked the GWNC to support a suggestion to the City Council that senior citizens be allowed to purchase a second taxi coupon book per quarter. She said that van programs are inadequate and that seniors need better access to taxis, which are the cheapest form of transportation and cost the City less than van programs.

Director Russell Sherman said he has talked about this issue with Jim Fong at the Department of Transportation, who is concerned about maintaining funding for the van programs, which are used by the severely disabled, who can't use taxis.

Director Owen Smith asked how the taxi coupons affect the van programs, and Mr. Sherman said Mr. Fong is afraid the extra taxi coupons might be financed by taking funding from the van programs.

Ms. Taylor said the taxi coupon books are sponsored by the DOT, which has nothing to do with the Department of Aging, which funds the van programs. Mr. Smith noted that Ms. Taylor only wants us to consider allowing people to purchase a second coupon book, and that we aren't being asked to figure out how to fund the program. Ms. Taylor confirmed this, saying that she's just asking that we ask the City Council to find the funds for more taxi coupons...not that we specify where those funds come from.

Mr. Smith moved that the GWNC support a recommendation that the City Council find funds to allow seniors and the disabled to purchase a second book of taxi coupons per quarter.

Director Shar Penfold seconded the motion. It carried unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Russell Sherman reported that all our financial data is posted on the DONE website (<http://www.done.lacity.org/onlinefunding/ncfunding.aspx>), including our current budget balance. He said the information there is up to date, although we still haven't paid the Hollywood Beautification the funding we voted to provide, and there are also invoices outstanding on the Wilshire Crest School landscaping project.

Ad Hoc Special Projects Committee

Director Margy Hudson and stakeholder Yolie Moreno passed around photos of the new playground equipment at Robert Burns Park, and reported that the neighbors have also requested a new fence, with a locking gate. Ms. Hudson said the City Council office will provide approximately \$75,000 for the fence and new benches (which have a historic feel). She said they're also working with the City on a new irrigation system for the park, and re-seeding the lawn. There will also be an ADA-compliant portable restroom, and all the trees are being trimmed as well. In addition, she said, they want to purchase 20 new litter receptacles to replace the oil drums that are there now, and are seeking bids for painting the new fence, a job that has been estimated by one city contractor to cost \$97,000 (so they're seeking other bids). She said there is a proposal for a new path (to be made of decomposed granite), to be funded by Proposition K funds, and also some sort of shade structures for the playground. Ms. Hudson said that she'd like to propose that the GWNC provide \$19,000 in funding for the litter receptacles, which are specially weighted to prevent theft and will be shipped from Maryland.

Director Jim Wolf asked if we can't find trash cans closer than Maryland, saying the long-distance transportation isn't very "green." He also cautioned that the decomposed granite for the park path be compacted enough to be ADA compliant.

Director Shar Penfold asked if 20 trash cans would really be enough for the park, and Ms. Moreno said they would be – she's always "amazed" how clean the park is after large birthday parties, and how fast people clean up after themselves.

Director Jane Gilman asked if we couldn't just paint the old oil drums, but Ms. Hudson said they're rusted out. Ms. Hudson agreed, however, that we could look for other sources – closer to home – for the new litter receptacles. Nikki Ezhari, Field Deputy for City Council Member Tom La Bonge, asked if we had considered simply bolting down the new trash cans, instead of buying ones that are too heavy to move, and Ms. Hudson said we hadn't.

Director Mary Rajswing said it would be a shame not to continue the momentum that's been created on this project, and added that it would be nice to include recycling cans. Renee Weitzer, City Council Member Tom La Bonge's Chief of Staff, said she would find out whether the parks recycle.

Stakeholder Kathleen Mulligan asked if Ms. Ezhari would e-mail her the recent audit of the Quimby Funds program (which collects money for parks from developers working in the area), and Ms. Ezhari said she would.

Director John Gresham asked if it would be appropriate, when considering funding for this project, to keep in mind that the City may cut our funds next year. Ms. Hudson said we have approximately \$100,000 in our budget now, and Mr. Gresham said that next year, we could get only \$35,000. Mr. Wolf said the City will also probably take back the excess of our current \$100,000 budget that we don't spend this year.

Ms. Weitzer confirmed this, saying that if we don't use the funds it seems to

indicate we don't need them. Still, she said, she doesn't really think the budget cuts will pass, but she will speak to it at the budget hearings on Monday.

Director Jane Usher said we do need to have published funding guidelines and that we should consider funding requests in batches, a couple of times a year. She said that by considering and approving things one at a time, we really don't know the magnitude of requests that might be coming to us. That said, however, she added that this is definitely a worthwhile project and we should make a contribution for capital improvements, even though it is kind of putting the cart before the horse. She also said she doesn't think we really want to spend \$19,000 on trash cans, though we do certainly want to help beautify the park .

Ms. Moreno agreed with Ms. Usher about the price of the trash cans, saying she's "outraged" at some of the costs that have been quoted. For example, she got a fence-painting estimate of \$4,000 from an outside vendor, but the City still wants to use its approved vendor, who quoted \$97,000.

Ms. Usher asked why we can't decide how much we should spend, and then get invoices and pay people to do the job. Director Elizabeth Fuller said that's how it worked on her Wilshire Crest School project.

Ms. Gilman moved that we contribute \$20,000 for capital improvements in the beautification of Robert Burns Park, and that we ask the Ad Hoc Special Projects Committee to report back to us on how the money was spent. Ms. Usher seconded the motion.

Ms. Ezhari asked if this money could be used to pay for paint if we hold a community volunteer day to paint the fence without a contractor, and Ms. Usher said the motion doesn't specify how the money can be used, so that would be fine.

The motion passed unanimously.

Ad Hoc Funding Guidelines Committee

Director Elizabeth Fuller reported that the Wilshire Crest Big Sunday project the GWNC voted to fund at its last meeting was a big success. With the help of the Big Sunday organization, more than 500 volunteers participated. Our City Council District contributed an additional \$1,000 for entertainment, mulch and tools, and the Curtis School (which was matched with Wilshire Crest by Big Sunday) provided about 250 volunteers and all the food for the event. The LAUSD also contributed paint and cleaning supplies. In all, the organizers spent \$3,148.01 of the \$4,000 the GWNC voted to contribute (mostly for plants and janitorial services), and we also learned a lot about the process of funding a project through the GWNC and DONE.

Ms. Fuller concluded by handing out the list of project funding guidelines that were defined in our initial discussions about the Wilshire Crest project, and which people

had agreed were good criteria for judging future funding requests.

Stakeholders Myrna Gintel and Laura Cohen distributed a handout outlining their request for funds to help with the creation of a sensory garden for blind and multi-handicapped children at the Frances Blend School for the Visually Impaired. They said the project meets many of the criteria listed in the document distributed by Ms. Fuller, and included a letter from the school's principal expressing her support for the project. Ms. Gintel said they are asking the GWNC to contribute \$13,000 of the proposed \$180,000 budget, and noted that they currently have \$20,000 in in-kind commitments.

Director Margy Hudson asked if the school is located in the Larchmont neighborhood and, if so, if they have gone to the Larchmont Village Neighborhood Association for funding. Ms. Gintel said they have not done so yet; the GWNC is their first stop. She said they will also be going to foundations and other organizations for financial support.

Ms. Fuller offered two cautions to Ms. Gintel and Ms. Cohen, based on her experience with the Wilshire Crest project: 1. That they be very aware of DONE's requirements and procedures for fund distribution (e.g. payments are via invoice only; there can be no "grants," no up-front money and no reimbursements), and 2.) that they be aware of the LAUSD's strict requirements for using only plants that are on the district's "approved" list (something that did become a major issue in planning the garden at Wilshire Crest). Ms. Gintel said she is aware of the restrictions, and Ms. Hudson suggested they also contact other schools with successful garden projects to find out how they implemented them.

Director Jane Gilman moved that we approve up to \$15,000 for materials for the Frances Blend School Sensory Garden. Director Owen Smith seconded the motion.

Stakeholder Karen Gilman noted that the LVNA is not a wealthy association, but said that won't stop her from presenting the project to them, and that she definitely supports it. She said that it's nice to be part of something like this in our community.

Director John Gresham asked what kind of financial contribution is being made by the LAUSD, and Ms. Cohen said it hasn't made a commitment yet, but the principal will contact them. Mr. Gresham said the LAUSD should be "ashamed" if they don't sponsor this.

The motion passed unanimously.

Million Trees Project

Director Mary Rajswing reported that the GWNC was represented at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Hollywood Beautification Team building on Cherokee. She also said that our planting partners made the cement cuts today for 7 new trees along La Brea Ave., and more around the perimeter of Wilshire Crest Elementary

School. She said our “deputy” is still working in the La Brea-Hancock neighborhood, where we will be planting several trees. Finally, she reported that Director Moon Chung lobbied West Bethel Church on La Brea, in Korean, to try to convince them to plant some trees, but they turned him down.

Ad Hoc Outreach Committee

Committee Chair Margy Hudson reported that we have hired a web designer and will make a more detailed report on that project at our next meeting. The guest speaker at our July meeting will be someone from the Department of Public Works, who will talk about potholes, sidewalks, streetlights and other frequently-raised neighborhood issues.

DWP Oversight Committee

DWP Oversight Representative Jack Humphreville could not attend the meeting, so this report was tabled.

Public Comments

A stakeholder asked how the GWNC will be voting on Propositions 98 and 99 in the upcoming city election, but Director Jane Usher said the GWNC does not take positions in public elections.

Ad Hoc Land Use and Zoning Committee

Stakeholder Karen Gilman said that she would still like to get the GWNC land use letter, which was promised at our November meeting. She also asked when our Land Use Committee meets and who’s on it. Land Use Committee Chair Jim Wolf said there are several people on the committee and that we would like to be more proactive on specific development issues, but it’s difficult because of delayed notifications and the fact that we meet only once every two months. He says we do receive some notices about new projects, which are distributed to Board Members by our Secretary, and that we find out about others via Early Notification Reports from the City Planning Commission (though many projects in our area don’t appear on the reports). He said it was nice to hear Ms. Goldberg talk about “good planning” this evening. Also, the questions raised about the cumulative effects of development are something we’ve been hearing a lot of lately, and it’s good to hear that the City wants to be more proactive on this issue as well.

Director Jane Usher said she can’t talk to this group about specific cases, but did want to contribute a couple of general thoughts. First, the process of rewriting the Community Plans, which Ms. Goldberg is relying on, is a 10-year endeavor. The Wilshire Community Plan will be the last in line for a rewrite (because it’s the newest one in the City), and won’t be done until 2017...so we still have to get ourselves to 2017. Until then, everything will be negotiated by exception. And how do we “band-aid” until then?

She said that when the Planning Commission considers entitlements for new projects, all they see is one sheet of paper summarizing all the community input (for example, a note that there was “a petition signed by 98 people”). And the developers declare victory if people don’t show up en masse. So it’s very important actually to attend public hearings. For example, on the Camerford Lofts project, the developer said it had been approved by the neighborhood, simply because the neighbors didn’t weigh in with a protest. Very often, the only item that will come in on a project is a letter from the GWNC, so it’s very important to keep those letters coming.

Ms. Gilman said the Camerford Lofts project has been going on for two years, but there is still an opportunity for neighbors to attend the last hearing – on May 20 – or for the GWNC to send a letter.

Director Patti Carroll asked if we could make a motion to send a letter opposing the project. Mr. Wolf said we sent a letter in April, but noted that the project design has changed since then.

Ms. Usher said the project has already left the Planning Commission, so she can comment on it. She said the developer asked for very dense zoning and was denied. In a revision, they asked for the same zoning change through a variance. She said the Planning Commission always asks, “Is this what belongs here?” And in this case, the Commission said, “No” and denied the application.

Continuing on with more information about how the Commission makes its decisions, she said there are two kinds of restraints on a building’s size: density and height limits...or Floor Area Ration (FAR). She also noted that if developers do come and talk to the neighbors, “they don’t have a by-right project.” At least 25% of what the Planning Commission does, she said, is turn things down, even though most are approved by the City Council. She also said that that the new design for the Camerford Lofts could be OK, if they meet sidewalk width, height and other zoning requirements.

Mr. Wolf said we would send a letter by the hearing date, and asked if he could take a few moments to write a motion to support the Planning Commission’s recommendations for how the project should be revised.

Board Member Comments

While Mr. Wolf drafted his motion, Director Jane Usher reported on the latest MTA updates to its Westside Transit Study. Recalling that the GWNC had voted to take no position (until further study could be completed) on the issue of a future transit stop at Crenshaw and Wilshire, she said the MTA has now labeled that stop “optional” on maps presented at last month’s public meetings, so they definitely heard and listened to our concerns. She also says the current plans show the potential Crenshaw line branching to either La Brea or Western.

She said, however, that at the end of the meeting she attended, a representative of

the Community Redevelopment Agency announced that the CRA would be writing a letter in support of a Crenshaw/Wilshire station. Ms. Usher said she asked the representative why the Agency hasn't talked to the community about this, but said she didn't get an answer. She said it's possible that this might have been a "rogue" comment by the speaker, and not an official position of the CRA, but she said a representative of U.S. Representative Diane Watson, who also attended the MTA meeting, seemed "agitated" by our concern, and later consulted privately with the CRA representative. Ms. Usher said we need answers about the CRA's interest in this issue as soon as possible. Also, she said, the MTA showed a map at that same meeting, which illustrated employee and residential populations at various points along the proposed Wilshire route. She said the map erroneously showed too much population at Wilshire and Crenshaw, and since that data will be used to plan future transit stops, we need to correct it. She asked that we put this item on our next agenda for discussion and possible action.

Director Elizabeth Fuller reported that Sonic Automotive, parent company of Beverly Hills BMW, has flipped its plans for a new development on Wilshire Boulevard. The first version of the plans, she recalled, put a BMW showroom on the current site of the Lou Ehlers Cadillac dealership, and a BMW service center on the current site of Bob's Big Boy. Both the neighborhoods and the City Council District office opposed the zoning changes that would be required for that plan, however, so Sonic is now proposing to build the service center on the north side of the street, and its showroom on the south side. Bob's has been given an eviction notice for June 30, but the LA Conservancy has expressed interest in possibly preserving both the Bob's and Ehlers buildings.

Ms. Usher noted that auto sales give more sales tax revenue to the City than any other kind of land use.

Ad Hoc Land Use and Zoning Committee (cont'd)

Returning to the Camerford Lofts discussion, Mr. Wolf moved that:

"As it relates to the project commonly called the "Camerford Lofts Project," The Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council opposes the development as proposed by the development team. Also, the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council supports the position taken by the City of Los Angeles planning Commission during its recent meeting, which occurred on December 13, 2007, for the same reasons the City of Los Angeles Planning Commission opposed the proposed project. In addition, the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council encourages the City to take into account the cumulative negative impacts the proposed project will impose upon the City utility infrastructures and upon the local on-street parking, which should be resolved prior to granting any project on the proposed parcels."

Director John Gresham seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Announcements

Director Margy Hudson noted that Director Jane Usher will be speaking this coming Saturday at the Citywide Alliance of Neighborhood Councils.

Director Mary Rajswing invited people to take home any snacks that are left on the table when the meeting is adjourned.

President Charlie Dougherty announced that our next meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 9.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Fuller
Secretary