

Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council



Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council Special Meeting #1 of 2

June 9, 2010

Approved by the Board
07/14/10

MINUTES

Call to Order

A duly noticed meeting of the Board of Directors of the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council (“GWNC”) was held on Wednesday, June 9, 2010, at the Ebell of Los Angeles, 743 South Lucerne Blvd. President Charles Dougherty called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m.

Roll Call

The Secretary, Elizabeth Fuller, called the roll. Board of Directors members in attendance at the roll call were: Charles D’Atri (alt. Jared Abrams), Yigal Arens, Patti Carroll, Charles Dougherty, Elizabeth Fuller, Jane Gilman, Rudy Gintel, John Gresham, Alex Jones-Moreno, Owen Smith, and James Wolf. Director Jane Usher and Patty Lombard (alt. Shar Penfold) joined the meeting later. Directors Charles Bergson, Moon Chung, Sam Cunningham, Frances McFall, Margaret Hudson, Clinton Oie, Martha Schuur and Russell Sherman were absent and not represented by an alternate.

The Secretary stated that a quorum was not present. The meeting proceeded with non-voting items.

Treasurer’s Report

YTD GWNC Budget Update -- Acting Treasurer Elizabeth Fuller distributed reports showing credit card and other spending to date for the current fiscal year.

2010-2011 Fiscal Year Budget -- Ms. Fuller also distributed a second draft of the tentative 2010-2011 fiscal year budget, which now includes a tentative rollover amount in addition to our new annual allocation of \$45,000. Because DONE has not yet provided the final versions of the budget worksheet and exact rollover balance, we do not have to vote to approve the budget until our July meeting.

Director Jane Gilman asked how we can guarantee that we’ll be allowed to hire an administrative assistant. Ms. Fuller said if we approve the line item in the budget as a

whole, we will be able to hire someone.

Director Yigal Arens asked what items were going to be cut if we didn't receive any rollover funds. Ms. Fuller said we had agreed to cut office rental and associated costs (such as a computer, office supplies, phone line, etc.). She said we had also discussed whether or not the Green Islands project will actually need our funding, and said she has contacted the project's organizers, but hasn't heard back from them yet.

[Alternate Director Patty Lombard joined the meeting at 7:26 p.m.]

Director Owen Smith asked about the allocation for the Lou Ehlers landmark application. Ms. Fuller said we approved that fee two years ago, when an application was being written for the Ehlers building that has since been torn down...but the consultant never billed us.

Alternate Director Patty Lombard noted that we have received a bid for writing meeting minutes from David Levin, who writes them for several other neighborhood councils. Mr. Levin charges by the hour, and it would come to about \$150 per meeting for his services. She asked how we can expedite his hiring. President Dougherty said we can hire more than one assistant (or kind of assistant), as long as the total cost doesn't exceed the amount we've allocated.

Director Rudy Gintel asked why we need office space. Ms. Fuller said we need accessible storage for inventory items, records and correspondence. Currently, everything is stored at her home, which isn't easily accessible by other officers and board members. Also, an assistant would need access to our files, and isn't allowed to work in another board member's home, and isn't allowed to take our records to their own home.

Ms. Lombard asked if we could rent storage and/or work space at the Ebell, and Ms. Fuller said we could, if we could afford the rent. Ms. Lombard said she would check into it.

City Budget Update – City Budget representative Jack Humphreville said the City now has a supposedly balanced budget, but a lot depends on the sale of city parking assets, and it's yet to be seen how that will work. He said infrastructure is also still a huge problem, which the City will have to address sooner or later. And the third ongoing problem is the city pension fund, which relies on "creative accounting." He said the overall budget situation is only going to get worse and the city is not doing anything about it.

Director Jane Gilman asked why it would be a problem to change benefit terms for new city employees, to help with the budget. Mr. Humphreville said this is done in corporate America, but people are afraid it would designate those employees as second class citizens, which would impede the City's ability to hire people.

DWP Oversight

DWP liaison Jack Humphreville said the City now has a preliminary DWP budget. The DWP general manager is an investment banker type with a good grasp of numbers. The new budget indicates water rates will go up about 3-5%, however, water rates for homeowners will increase even more because of shortage year water rates. Mr. Humphreville said the good news is that residents have cut water consumption by 10%...but that also means there's less revenue coming in, and overhead costs haven't gone down. Power rates will be going up by 6%, however, power rates for homeowners will increase even more because of the Rate Restructuring Plan and the tiered rate structure. The DWP and the City had a huge dispute over the Energy Cost Adjustment Factor (ECAAF) that is subject of a review by the Controller and further meetings of the City Council. One issue now will be long-term plans for both water and power. There will also will be fights over the issue of an independent ratepayers' advocate and several transparency motions filed by the City Council (these came out of the ECAAF fight). The motions would allow the City Council to have a lot more say in the business of the DWP – such as the ability to remove the General Manager and commissioners, as well as budget approval and approval of rate increases. This would create more checks and balances, but it would also give the Council Members leverage for their own pet projects.

President's Report

GWNC Election Results/Certification Update – This item was tabled for the second meeting of the evening.

City Council District Four Report -- Nikki Ezhari, field deputy for City Council Member Tom La Bonge, said the city government is really feeling the effects of budget cuts now -- every department responds to queries by saying people are on furlough, departments are under staffed, and the remaining employees just can't get to things.

Ms. Ezhari said lunch trucks are a big issue now and Mr. La Bonge is working on an ordinance to protect neighborhood parking and restaurants. She said they do recognize the trucks are popular, but there does need to be a balance. In addition, the CD 4 office is working on Phase II of the John Burroughs school landscaping project, and it was chosen as to be a landscaping, chosen to be a beneficiary of the Hancock Park Garden Party. She said more work will be done at the front of the school, and on the Wilshire Boulevard side.

[Director Jane Usher joined the meeting at 7:46 p.m., creating a quorum]

Ms. Ezhari said the office is working with Hancock Park Homeowners' Association President Cindy Chvatal to create a general beautification plan for Hancock Park, which would include tools, plants, median improvements, monuments, etc. Also, she said, community boundaries for Koreatown have been approved as previously described. CD 4 is also asking LAPD to install cameras in the Olympic Division area, to keep crime from creeping into Windsor Square and Hancock Park.

Director Rudy Gintel asked if the lunch truck rules will apply to Larchmont Boulevard, and Ms. Ezhari said they would – they’re hoping to pass a restriction against retail transactions in parking zones. Alternate Director Patty Lombard asked what that would mean for the lunch trucks. Ms. Ezhari said there doesn’t seem to be a way to control them through county health or trash regulations, so the parking zone rules seem to be the only way to do it – they affect public safety. She said spaces at public parking meters are not intended to allow commerce; they’re just there to allow people to park their cars and run errands.

Ms. Lombard asked where the trucks would be allowed to operate and Ms. Ezhari said zones would be created that would keep the trucks a certain distance from one another and from other businesses. She said there is a lunch truck professional organization that maintains strict rules for things like restrooms, distance from restaurants and trash cleanup...but many of the new gourmet trucks aren’t following the rules.

Director Owen Smith asked why the city can’t provide a place for the trucks in a park. Ms. Ezhari said people have suggested that and some of the trucks are willing to do that. But while it would solve the problem on Wilshire Boulevard, it wouldn’t solve the problem on Larchmont.

Alternate Director Charlie D’Atri said the truck are very trendy, very popular and have lots of patrons, so it would seem to be in the City’s interest to find a way to tax them and make this work. Ms. Ezhari said that’s true, but bricks-and-mortar restaurants have made big investments in their property, pay for city trash service, etc., and it’s not fair for the trucks to take advantage of that.

Director Patti Carroll asked if the trucks are allowed in residential zones. Ms. Ezhari said they’re allowed everywhere at this point.

Director John Gresham asked what Mr. La Bonge’s position is on the sale of the City’s parking facilities. Ms. Ezhari said she can’t say, but does know that he’s “dead set against” the sale of the Larchmont parking facility. Mr. Gresham said Mr. La Bonge has to recognize that we’re trading long-term revenue to solve a short-term problem. Mr. D’Atri agreed, saying Chicago officials learned their sale of parking assets was a very bad idea, and wouldn’t do it again if they could do it over. Mr. Humphreville noted that in Chicago, parking rates increased five times after the sale, and revenues went up eight times. So we’d probably also see a big rise in rates.

[At this point, at 7:54 p.m., the meeting was paused to allow the convening of the night’s second Special Meeting. The meeting was re-convened after that meeting adjourned, at 8:33 p.m.]

Approval of Minutes

Secretary Elizabeth Fuller presented the minutes from the last meeting.

Corrections requested:

- On p. 10, “carreid” should be “carried”
- On p. 13, “July 9” should be “June 9”

Director Jane Gilman moved the minutes be approved as amended. Director Owen Smith seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Community Concerns

Memorial Library Landscaping Project – Director Owen Smith said plans for the project are still taking shape, and he will return when there’s more to report.

Outreach Committee

Website Re-Design – Outreach committee member Elizabeth Fuller reported that the next step is to discuss specific items for the site’s navigation with our designer, but she’s been too busy recently to do that.

Facebook and Twitter Feeds – Ms. Fuller said she recently launched both Facebook and Twitter feeds for GWNC information. People can subscribe by searching for “Greater Wilshire” on either service.

Land Use Committee

LA City Planning Code Simplification -- Land Use Committee Chair James Wolf explained that Alan Bell, from the city Planning Department spoke to the committee about an effort, now underway, to simplify the Department’s codes and procedures. He said the Department is hoping the simplifications will help it operate more efficiently with reduced budgets and staff. As the committee heard more about the process, however, it was concerned that some of the streamlining specifics might not be beneficial to our area – for example elimination or reduction of certain notification radii and/or public hearing on certain issues. Mr. Wolf said the Committee feels that more needs to be understood about the simplifications being made before they should be approved. Unfortunately, however, the Planning Department timetable starts the discussion process in June, with votes soon afterwards, which we felt was putting the cart before the horse. Mr. Bell agreed the current proposal is vague, and that they would like support for the idea of simplification, but our committee felt it was difficult to embrace the city’s timetable when it’s based on such vague language at this point. The committee recommended that we ask the City to extend the discussion/approval for at least 90 days, and noted also that it now starts during the summer, when many people are out of town. He said the committee wants to make sure that all of the discussion on the issue stays in the public realm and that specific bodies will only take action after an ordinance has been well crafted with genuine, substantial input from the public.

Director Rudy Gintel moved that we adopt the Land Use Committee

recommendation that the proposed City Planning Commission's June 10 study session on the Code Simplification Work Program (with corresponding ordinances) and the following approval schedule of July, August and September be delayed a minimum of 90 days to perform Charter-mandated outreach and exchange of feedback with each Neighborhood and Community Council and community. Alternate Director Patty Lombard seconded the motion.

Director John Gresham said the planners are more overworked and burdened by processes they consider waste of time...but they want to subject public to similar cutbacks by cutting public involvement in decision-making. The examples of simplifications they provided were important, not ministerial. So the language needs to be clear and vetted before we support it.

Director Jane Usher asked for examples. Mr. Gresham said one thing they're proposing is automatic approvals for 10% increases in fence heights, setbacks, etc., with no public review process...and we're very concerned about those things.

Mr. Wolf said it's also unclear how they're going to apply the rules and where they're going to draw the lines. He said we've learned that we have to rely on city staff to solve problems without public input, we lose the ability to have different standards in different areas. Some of the proposed changes might be OK, but the timetable for the discussion process just doesn't seem right – so we're asking for the schedule to be expanded so they can extend outreach, public review sessions, etc.

Mr. Gintel said this is a huge endeavor – they want to re-do the whole code, and it feels like the City is ramming it down our throats.

Mr. Gresham said another example of a proposed simplification is the narrowing of notice radii in many cases, sometimes limiting it to just next door neighbors. Mr. Wolf said we already get lots of "How come no one knew about this?" questions, and shrinking the notice radius would make that problem even worse.

The motion passed unanimously.

Wine Tasting CUP – 6801 Melrose – Committee Chair Jim Wolf reported that the owner of a wine shop at this address has applied for a Conditional Use Permit to allow wine tasting in the store. The tasting area would be in a small, well-defined area of the retail space, and tastes would be sold (for about \$1 per taste) in 1 oz. quantities. The owner says she isn't trying to increase store traffic (so there shouldn't be any parking impacts), and is just trying to offer an extra service to customers that would help increase sales. We received three letters in favor of the petition and none opposed. The committee has recommended that the GWNC support the application. Alternate Director Patty Lombard moved that we support the application. Alternate Director Charles D'Atri seconded the motion. The vote was 12 in favor and 1 abstention (Usher).

Mr. Wolf noted that summaries of other issues discussed at the last Land Use

meeting are contained in the agenda, and they will be brought back to this group if and when board action is required.

Board Member Comments/New Business

Director Rudy Gintel stated for the record that he think it's "ridiculous" that we can't seat our new board members in races where there were no challenges. He would like to see us seat everyone but the representative for the challenged seat and "go on with our lives."

Public Comments

Stakeholder Karen Gilman announced that the dedication ceremony for the new sensory garden at the Frances Blend School will be held tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. The GWNC contributed funds for the project, and many of our stakeholders were volunteers. She said City Council Member Tom La Bonge and field deputy Nikki Ezhari will also be there. Director John Gresham said he read recently that both Frances Blend and Van Ness Schools (which share the site) will both be losing staff next year. Director Rudy Gintel said plans to combine the schools were scrapped, but they may lose an assistant principal to budget cuts...although the budget situation is still evolving and plans could change.

Announcements and Adjournment

Director Patti Carroll reported that the Hollywood High School performance of "Rent" is excellent and distributed flyers for the show, which is playing this weekend, encouraging people to attend.

President Dougherty announced that he will be out of town next month, so Vice President Jim Wolf will chair the next meeting...and we will probably know the outcome of our election issues before that meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Fuller
Secretary