



**June 16, 2008 Meeting Report
by Richard Bort**

**Our featured speaker
LeeAnn M. Pelham,
Executive Director of L.A. City Ethics Commission.**



LeeAnn M. Pelham is charged with the responsibility to uphold the standards that the public voted for in 1990 when they approved disclosure by lobbyists of their lobbying activities. She heads a staff of 27 and is responsible for a \$2.5 million annual budget and an \$11 million Public Matching Funds Trust Fund. The Ethics Commission also ensures that the ethics laws and regulations are understood by the public, candidates, and officeholders, and the Commission enforces the laws and standards.

Ms. Pelham discussed the program of Full Public Financing (FPF) that is being actively discussed in L.A. political circles and is currently under review by L.A. Neighborhood Councils. She said that her office has been looking into FPF, has drawn some conclusions about it, and is concerned about some issues. Specifically, unlike the "Clean Money" approach, where a new public financing system would be started from scratch, her staff believes that it would be better for the city to build on the city's already in place "Partial Public Finance" system that has been used for many years for citywide offices (Mayor, Controller, City Attorney, etc.). Among the critical issues are determination of how much a FPF would cost the city and the amount of public funding that should be made available to each of the various candidates. Also how to deal with so-called independent expenditures made on behalf of a candidate that is running outside of the public financing system that significantly exceeds the funding provided to the candidate that chooses the FPF option. Details of the FPF plan are under review but the city's future budget situation will undoubtedly delay the implementation of the program. Successful FPF programs in AZ and Maine have been in place since 2000. The governor of AZ, Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, was elected running as a "Clean Money" FPF candidate.

Other questions with which her office has been wrestling include:

Whether contribution limits should be adjusted for inflation.

Enforcement of multiple lobbying laws in the city.

Financial Disclosure by the Board members of Neighborhood Councils when the NC initiates a Council File. (CEC Form 52)

Valley VOTE Committee Reports followed Ms. Pelham remarks.

***Broken Sidewalks, Broken Districts, Broken Housing,
It All Adds Up to Politics As Usual in L.A.***

The old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," is terrific advice except that much of what the various Valley VOTE speakers discussed at this meeting revolved around broken processes, rules, and promises. Here's a summary of what they had to say.

Broken Sidewalks

Vic Viereck, Valley VOTE's Treasurer and resident residential real estate maven, led off by discussing the city's controversial plan to have residents fix the city's broken sidewalks. He noted that about 4,600 miles of city sidewalks are broken, and at the current pace of repairs it will take only 83 years to fix them.

Vic described the city's plan – not yet passed by the City Council – to require any broken sidewalks to be fixed when the residential property is sold. He noted that the SEIU public employees union Local 721 is behind this scheme, despite that in many cases the sidewalks are broken because of the roots of trees that the city has planted in the parkway between the sidewalk and the curb.

Broken Districts (state)

Richard Bort followed by discussing the Ca. State Redistricting Initiative that will be on the November 2008 ballot. He noted that normally the root of all evil is money, but in California politics that root grows side by side with the carefully drawn legislative districts that protect incumbent politicians and their political parties. The ballot initiative, if approved by voters, will provide a means to select a carefully balanced Redistricting Commission of 14 members. Bort commented that the 14-member commission seems to be a much better approach than **Gov. Schwarzenegger's** previous approach to have redistricting conducted by a small panel of retired judges. Finally, Bort noted, perhaps "the voters will be able to select their politicians instead of the politicians selecting their voters."

The Commission will draw new boundaries for the California Assembly Districts. By law, two adjacent Assembly Districts make up one Senate District, so that is almost automatically determined. Congressional redistricting is not a part of this ballot initiative because that falls under federal legislation. The new redistricting lines will be established after the national census in 2010.

Bort noted that the Valley VOTE Executive Committee has approved a position in support of the ballot initiative, and Valley VOTE's President, **Joe Vitti**, commented that he will ask for the full Board's approval in September.

Broken Housing

George Truesdell discussed three issues that currently concern Neighborhood Councils: The first is the local ordinance aimed at implementing SB 1818, which allows density bonuses and other incentives for developers if they include even a modicum of affordable housing in their new developments. Another broken process that has a fix is Neighborhood Council elections. On June 28, the City Clerk's office will conduct the Neighborhood Council elections for the first time. Under the new regime, each NC will hold elections every two years, with the terms of office for NC directors of four years. This is a change for most NCs, but the objective is to provide some experienced election management and remove the burden from the NCs themselves. Finally, some NCs are deeply concerned about the proliferation of so-called Sober-Living homes throughout the Valley. Two parallel bills are working their way through Sacramento, SB 992 and AB 724, which would regulate these facilities, which are largely unregulated currently.

SB 1818

On the topic of SB 1818, **Barbara Monahan Burke**, VP and director of the Studio City NC, told Valley VOTE that a new bill, AB 2280, which had been hoped to amend SB 1818 to make the implementation by cities easier and more friendly to current residents, has been mercilessly gutted. It is generally acknowledged that implementation of SB 1818 in Los Angeles would very likely reduce – rather than increase – the stock of affordable housing. AB 2280 initially called for higher proportions of a project to be dedicated to affordable housing, but she noted that the extremely broken State Assembly has gutted it to the point where it will provide no substantive improvement in city's ability to implement SB 1818. Ms. Burke went on to say that SB 1818 applies to all multi-family buildings that lie within a 1,500-foot radius of a Metro station. That would affect some 60 percent of Ventura Blvd., she noted.

LAWA Noise Study at Van Nuys Airport

Denny Schneider, a member of Valley VOTE's Executive Committee and president of ARSAC, which is the Westchester area watchdog of the L.A. World Airports (LAWA), reported that a noise study of Van Nuys Airport isn't likely to be completed until 2009, by which time it is likely, he said, that additional flights may be shifted to VNY from Burbank's Bob Hope Airport. Stand back as we watch this formerly pretty good situation actually break down before our very eyes!

DWP Update

Jack Humphreville, Valley VOTE's maven watching over the LADWP, noted that there's trouble ahead with the well-intentioned plan to price power by tiers of usage and to overlay that with geographical zones (a plan that was covered in the media last month). He said that the capability of the DWP's computers to handle the complex billing calculations is highly suspect. Perhaps we can provide the service of introducing the DWP's I.T. folks to the Payroll people at the LAUSD.

Humphreville also noted that unlike other utilities, the DWP is not subject to any professional oversight. Sure, the city's Board of Water and Power Commissioners has oversight, but none of the commissioners has a background in management of a utility or experience in working for a utility. Moreover, unlike the California Public Utilities Commission that regulates the investor-owned utilities in this state, the LADWP Board has no staff to analyze rate requests. Furthermore, political patronage has loaded up the LADWP with political appointees in senior management positions, citing the lack of experience of both the top executive, H. David Nahai, Chief Executive Officer and General Manager, and Raman Raj, Chief Operating Officer. Nahai is a Century City attorney, and Raj is a human resources professional with no line experience in business and no public utility background.

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)

Gautam Dutta returned to Valley VOTE to discuss yet another broken system, the election system that requires expensive runoff elections. Mr. Dutta is Deputy Director of the Political Reform Program at the New America Foundation, which is promoting the notion of Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) as a means to avoid expensive runoff elections. The idea would be for each voter to mark the ballot with the order in which s/he prefers multiple candidates. For example, if there are three (or more) candidates, the voter would indicate on the ballot which candidate is the voter's #1 choice, the #2 choice, and #3 choice. Then the ballot counting process would determine the winner in the event that none of the candidates had a majority of the votes in the first count. A second count would be made after deleting all but the top two vote-getters. In response to questions, Dutta said that the new voting machines that L.A. County is required to order by May 2009 will have the capability to manage this kind of system; and that if IRV is approved in the November 2008 elections, it would take effect in 2011. Dutta noted both presumptive presidential candidates McCain and Obama support IRV.

The New America Foundation is funded by the nonpartisan, L.A.-based James Irvine Foundation (he of the Orange County Irvine family).

The next **Valley VOTE** meeting is scheduled for July 21, 2008

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE, a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations, is committed to exploring and fostering the implementation of programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters.

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