



Meeting Report for September 15, 2008

by

Denny Schneider and Richard Bort



Dennis Zine

Valley VOTE Board members, community leaders, and concerned citizens attended the September 15, 2008 meeting at **Galpin Ford** to hear from featured speakers, including L.A. City Councilman **Dennis Zine**, former California Assembly member and current lobbyist for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power **Cindy Montañez**, and **Marian Dodge** and **Kristin Sabo** discussing the potential designation of Griffith Park as a Historic Cultural Monument.

We encourage everyone to join us at these meetings on the third Monday of each month to hear the latest information and to participate in open discussion of various topics of community interest. For a meeting agenda, prior meeting reports, and press releases we encourage you to go to the Valley VOTE website: www.valleyvote.org.

Dennis Zine - Update on City Issues

Dennis Zine, plans to run for third and final term in 2009. He told us that he will continue to represent the interests of the Third Council District which encompasses the communities of Canoga Park, Reseda, Tarzana, West Hills, Winnetka, and Woodland Hills with a population of nearly 300,000 residents. In reiterating his views on a myriad of issues, Zine kept repeating his theme that overdevelopment is unacceptable and that we must "maintain our city as a livable place, create a business friendly environment where jobs and the environment are protected." Noting the importance of a good economic environment, Councilmember Zine stated, "More than a generation ago, a youngster would graduate high school and land a good-paying job at the General Motors assembly plant, eventually buy a home in a nearby community, and live comfortably. Today's generation, though, must have a college degree to have the same comfort level, and good jobs don't seem as plentiful, especially for those with only a high school education."

On various topics . . .

City Employees' Salaries – Los Angeles is an expensive place in which to live, and people need to earn enough to live here.

Proposition R (term limits and ethics reforms) – Zine said that a third term is needed for a City Council member to develop relationships and trust of the various governmental leaders outside of Los Angeles to most effective for our City.

Gang Tax – He opposes the proposed parcel tax. Current anti-gang activities should be assessed for effectiveness before new programs are started.

Sales Tax – He opposes the half-cent sales tax proposed by the Metropolitan Transit Authority. Government should live within its means.

Warner Center – The Westfield Topanga Mall, located in Zine's district, is spending \$1 billion to upscale and expand, including the "Village" at the corner of Topanga Canyon and Victory Blvds. Zine welcomes the project but insists upon sufficient parking, and traffic control without gridlock.

Mansionization – He supports limits on overbuilding on residential lots and strongly opposes large developments like Las Lomas.

Billboards – He opposes the proposed billboards for the Convention Center/Staples Center area because they probably would become a distraction for motorists on the Harbor Freeway and thereby become a source of traffic accidents.

Special Order 40 – He and LAPD Chief Bill Bratton are working on a plan, together with the federal bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) to be announced in October.

Medical Marijuana – He supports the distribution and use of marijuana for medicinal purposes, such as painful chronic diseases or cancer, as long as it is prescribed by a “legitimate doctor” and dispensed through a “legitimate pharmacy.” Otherwise, he noted that there are no regulations to control dispensing of medicinal marijuana from the many retail shops that have sprung up citywide.

Cindy Montañez -LA DWP

Formerly a member of the California Assembly and mayor of the City of San Fernando, Cindy Montañez was hired in January 2008 to help the municipal utility increase the proportion of electric power generated from renewable resources, including wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, etc. While the legislature has placed certain “green” requirements on utilities, there are some practical hurdles that stand in the way of implementing them. Cindy is wrestling with them. For example, Montañez noted that most power is generated outside the Los Angeles metropolitan area and must be transported a long distance to the urban core. That requires power transmission lines, which are opposed by many of the same environmental advocacy groups who are pushing for “green” generated power. When asked why no nuclear power plants are being developed in California, Montañez pointed to a 1976 state law that bans new nuclear plants in California. She also is working on groundwater issues, focusing on cleaning up groundwater supplies within the city of L.A. She said that the DWP needs to get Congress and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cooperate and fund this effort, for which she has been spending time in Washington D.C. talking to the agency and congressional representatives. Cindy has also been working to bring Gov. Schwarzeneggers’s “Million Solar Roofs” initiative to L.A. She noted that a solar system to power a home costs about \$30,000 to install, and that LADWP provides significant rebates.

Marian Dodge and Kristin Sabo

Griffith Park as a Historic-Cultural Monument?

Marian Dodge, representing the Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council, and Kristin Sabo, representing the Foothill Trails Neighborhood Council and who is a volunteer caretaker of Amir’s Garden in Griffith Park, spoke to Valley VOTE members to acquaint them with the nomination of Griffith Park as a Historic-Cultural Monument.

Alarmed by proposals over the last few years to commercialize Griffith Park by building hotels, restaurants, tramways and numerous parking structures, Col. Griffith J. Griffith’s heirs recently submitted an application to have all of Griffith Park designated as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. Presently there are eight parks in Los Angeles designated as Historic Cultural Monuments, including Echo Park, Barnsdall Art Park, and MacArthur Park. If approved as a Historic-Cultural Monument, Griffith Park would qualify for funding from other sources than just the city’s Recreation and Parks Department.

Designating the park as a historic cultural monument would make it tougher, but not impossible, to add a tramway or things like a highly commercialized “pleasure pier” suggested for the adjacent Los Angeles River. Significant new public buildings or changes to existing ones would have to go before the five-member Cultural Heritage Commission.

Councilman Tom LaBonge, in whose district the park is located, as well as some private interests, supports the Historic-Cultural designation for only certain historically significant parts of the park, such as particular historic buildings, but not the entire park. LaBonge reportedly feels that the designation would make city projects in the park unnecessarily difficult, more time-consuming and costly. This would, however, leave parts of the park unprotected from possibly unwise and unsupervised development (as well as ineligible for historic funding).

Ms. Dodge and Ms. Sabo asked Valley VOTE members to make their views known by sending customized letters and e-mails to the city’s Cultural Heritage Commission and Councilmember Tom LaBonge. They request that members strongly support the designation of the whole of Griffith Park as an L.A. Historic Cultural Monument. Details for submitting comments can be found at the website of the Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council, www.ggpnc.org.

Committee Reports

Denny Schneider- Airport Issues

The Van Nuys Airport EIR addressing the phase-out of noisy “Stage 2” aircraft will be released September 19, and a hearing held on October 7. EIR copies are online at www.LAWA.org.

Schneider then reported that Burbank’s Bob Hope Airport proposal to shift nighttime air traffic to Van Nuys Airport was rebuffed by a lengthy list of FAA concerns. Burbank has not responded, but Schneider said that he expects a Congressional legislation proposal instead. Valley VOTE opposes the current plan.

- LAWA is the commencing north taxiway repairs near Terminals 1 and 2. During the 60-day construction period, all landings, including late-night flights, will be over populated areas instead of over the ocean. This project includes installation and implementation of a Runway Status Light pilot program.
- The Board of Airport Commissioners conceptually approved a major cost savings modification to rebuild the Tom Bradley Terminal entirely. New construction is less than the retrofits required.

The controversial Master Plan EIR and accompanying NASA assessment of runway safety have both slipped to December 2009. Air Traffic Controller Union head told NASA and the professors assessing runway safety that nine of 10 incursions on the north airfield would be avoided by having full, appropriate tower staffing. He went on to say that the staffing issue takes precedence over any runway changes. In other words, the existing runway configuration has not been the problem.

Jack Humphreville -LA DWP issues

The City Council approved the Rate Restructuring Plan in July. As a result, Jack estimates that the energy charges for homeowners will increase 10-25%, hardly "revenue neutral" as touted in the DWP promotional materials. Jack said that the Rate Restructuring Plan was not very well conceived in that there are more efficient ways to reduce peak period demand and energy use than to raise rates.

Jack's estimate of the increase in electricity bills for homeowners is based on the announced rate increased in kilowatt hour charges plus higher pass-thru charges for fuels to produce the electricity. These include the costs associated with renewable energy and higher oil and gas prices, which are projected to increase about 35-40% over the next two years. As a result, he said, residential power bills will be going up about 20-25% over the next two years.

Jack wants a strong, knowledgeable, independent overseer to be appointed such as is employed by the California Public Utilities Commission to oversee PG&E, Southern California Edison, and San Diego Gas & Electric. Without this, he said, there will be no effective oversight. [Editor's Note- Good news!: On September 16, Nick Patsouris, President of the Board of Water and Power Commissioners, announced that he will put the discussion of an independent Ratepayers Advocate on the agenda of the Board's October 7 meeting.]

Polly Ward- Metro-Universal City Project

This massive proposed project would be located on Lankershim Blvd., across from the entrance to Universal Studios, next door to Weddington Park and the Metro Red Line station, and would surround the historic Campo de Cahuenga.

Polly Ward reported that the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for this project has finally been released. See City Planning Department's website, www.lacity.org/PLN (click on Environmental, then Draft EIR) for the official project description, how to obtain a copy of the DEIR, and where to send comments, which must be submitted in writing by November 24.

Local homeowner groups, chambers of commerce, and neighborhood councils in the vicinity of the proposed project are mobilizing to oppose the project, Ms. Ward reported. One wild card is the position that VICA will take on this project. Primary objections to the project are the lack of planning to handle the traffic that would be generated by the project, the blocking of sunlight from nearby residential areas, noise, and the change in the ambiance of the entire surrounding area. A major concern is that the proposed office tower, 26 stories high and 5 stories underground, is to be built in a riverbed. Previous projects along the L.A. River in the Studio City area were forced to be revised because of the water table that rises and causes flooding during the rainy season. Councilman Tom LaBonge has strongly opposed this proposed project, citing traffic and density concerns. He welcomes NBC, but he has urged the developers to build a complex that works for them and everyone else.

George Truesdell Neighborhood Councils

George Truesdell reported on three concerns of local area neighborhood councils relate to:

- The city's proposed ordinance implementing SB 1818, which requires concessions to developers in the number of parking spaces, increased density bonuses, and method of allocation to tenants of affordable housing units.
- The Mayor's proposal for Inclusionary Zoning for affordable housing units.
- Sober-Living Homes, noting that these unregulated businesses are being developed by individual investors who are packing residents into modest houses and being paid up to \$5,000 per month per resident.

Bart Reed Transportation Issues

We all grieve for the victims of the Chatsworth train crash last week when a commuter train collided head on with a southbound freight train killing 26 and injuring many more. Bart cautioned not to draw conclusions based on the initial news reports that it was the sole fault of the commuter train engineer for running a red light. He asked us to wait for the NTSB assessment of all of the equipment and circumstances. Bart noted that several safety features that have not been implemented on these trains that are long overdue. He pointed out that the rail traffic monitoring station receives only a rudimentary pictorial display of the trains without video. This station received notice of the crash *after* it occurred. Further, a very affordable, positive train control "dead man switch system" could stop trains if a collision is imminent. This system is already used on trucks but has not been incorporated on our local trains. Bart also pointed out that there is a high speed

rail initiative on the November ballot which could greatly reduced auto traffic. The pros and cons of this initiative are in the September Transit Coalition Newsletter and at www.transitcoalition.org .

Vic Viereck -Housing

Most people agree that some level of affordable housing is an acceptable social cost, but Vic Viereck noted that the city's Rent Stabilization Ordinance is being counterproductive toward that goal. Vic pointed out that there is a disincentive for apartment owners to maintain, let alone improve, their properties because a significant portion of the refurbishment cost cannot be recovered. From the start of Rent Stabilization in 1979 up until 1989 when the rules were changed, owners were allowed to pass on the full costs of improvements via a 1/60th of the expenditure was allowed as a monthly rent increase. In 1989 two additional limitations were added; the rent raise applied for a maximum of six years, and the absolute rent increase could not exceed \$55 per month. Vic pointed out that the number of units improved dropped precipitously after 1989. Prior to the new requirement about 2000+ buildings (out of about 118,000) were upgraded each year. That number has now dropped to just over 400. Los Angeles is paying the Economic Roundtable almost \$1 million to evaluate this trend and make recommendations.

The next **Valley VOTE** meeting is scheduled for **October 20, 2008**. Councilmember **Tom LaBonge** will be our featured speaker.

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.

Please forward this Email to interested individuals and organizations. If you would like to be removed from our distribution list please send an Email to javittisr@cs.com

[Click here to return to the Reports page](#)