



Meeting Report for November 17, 2008
by
Richard Bort and Denny Schneider

Valley VOTE Board members, community leaders, and concerned citizens convened on November 17, 2008 at Galpin Ford to hear City Council Member **Wendy Greuel** speak on current issues in the city. Also, **Aram Benyamin** spoke about the programs of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to maintain its power system reliability and to meet goals for "green power". In addition, several citizens attended who were also seeking signatures in order to become candidates in the March 2009 election. They were: Walter Moore- Mayor; David Hernandez- Mayor; Michael Amerian -City Attorney; Guillermo Huesca- Council Member, CD7; Curt Lowry- Community College District, Seat #7. Also, petitioners attended seeking signatures for placing an initiative on the ballot for "Jamiel's Law".

We encourage everyone to join us at these meetings, that are open to the public and the press, 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 and previous meeting reviews and press releases we encourage you to go to the Valley VOTE website: www.valleyvote.org.

Wendy Greuel



City Council Member, 2nd Council District
Update on City Issues

Wendy Greuel has visited Valley VOTE often since her election to the City Council in 2002. Currently, although she is not termed out of that office, she is running for City Controller to replace Laura Chick. Greuel currently chairs the council's Transportation Committee and is vice chair of the council's Budget and Finance Committee.

Greuel told the Valley VOTE audience that in her view **traffic** is the city's Number One problem, yet "lots of good things are happening" in that arena. The self-described "Pothole Queen" noted that for the first time since the Bradley administration the city is developing a strategic plan for transportation that will address both short and long term needs. This plan will be greatly enhanced by the funding that will be provided under recently passed Measure R.

Wendy also addressed the complex topics of ethics, government reform, and fiscal responsibility, all of which seem to be more in the gun sights of the Controller than any of the Council Members. She noted that the city has outstanding some \$500 million of uncollected "debts," ranging from unpaid police alarm permits, fines, ambulance charges, and the like, all of which need to be addressed to help balance the city's budget. She is also working on legislation to limit "ex parte" (that is, private) contacts between commissioners and decision-makers, such as Council Members and city department heads, to reduce conflicts of interest. Wendy also reported that she is working with Councilman Greig Smith, who is also a member of the Council's Budget and Finance Committee, to introduce a motion to increase the business tax reduction program by an additional 10 percent. She had spearheaded the last business tax reform plan – with help and support from Valley VOTE – that resulted in, among other things, reduction of the gross receipts tax on businesses by 15 percent, and she and Smith want to increase that tax reduction to 25 percent.

In the area of Land Use, Greuel supports the streamlining of the building permit process by reducing the number of departments needed to sign off on projects from 12 at present to two. Regarding the controversial Metro/Universal Project, which is nearby to, but not within, her district, Greuel is convinced that "there will be something above the MTA station," but she was noncommittal about what that "something" should be. She said that she has encouraged local groups and organizations to work to modify the project rather than to kill it altogether. She also discussed the current hold on further construction of the major addition to Providence Holy Cross Hospital in Mission Hills. Wendy explained that in her view it is merely a technicality that is holding it up and the Council is expected to vote next week to resolve the issue. It seems that when the Council last voted to approve the project without an Environmental Impact Report, the vote carried with eight votes, but the technicality was that the motion voted on was merely to "receive and file" the request to waive the EIR. Subsequently, a judge placed a hold on the project, stating that the Council must proactively either approve or reject the project, and that 10 votes (out of the 15 Council Members) is required.

A question was asked about how the Council could have approved the DWP's recent request for a multibillion dollar solar energy program that requires that only DWP's unionized workers may do all the installation work. Greuel explained that the Council voted only to take the initiative to the voters in March, not to approve the program. She went on to explain that Los Angeles has been well-served for decades by the fact that the city/DWP owns a substantial proportion of our own energy-producing assets. This has limited the amount of energy that DWP must purchase. Now that all utilities, including DWP, are mandated to increase the proportion of "green energy" in their portfolio to certain levels by certain dates in the future, the DWP has proposed a plan to install solar panels on roof tops throughout the city, including on residential, commercial, industrial, and government buildings.

Aram Benyamin
Senior Assistant General Manager - Power System
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

Mr. Benjamin divided his remarks into discussions of Power Reliability and the Renewable Energy program. He handed out several rather detailed – but interesting – pages showing the metrics that the DWP uses to measure its performance, and a breakdown of the current and anticipated sources of power.

The DWP's service area has 1,630 circuits, 303,000 poles, 126,000 transformers, and 17,000 miles of cable to keep L.A. powered up. As the city's population has grown, its power usage has multiplied at a far greater rate due to, among other things, home electronics. As a result, the DWP must cope with changes in the circuit loads as well as to replace worn out poles, cable, and transformers. In addition, with an aging work force, the DWP must make sure that training programs, both in-house and outside (primarily in local trade schools, much of which is funded by the DWP) keeps pace with anticipated retirements.

Mr. Benjamin shared with Valley VOTE the DWP's current project list showing the breakdown of its green power, amounting currently to 9.7 percent of the total power sales, and where increased amounts of green power will come from between now and 2015 in order to bring the energy "portfolio" up to the mandated levels. The DWP expects with a high degree of certainty to raise the proportion of green power to more than 15 percent by the end of 2010 and to more than 25 percent by 2020. These sources currently and prospectively include hydro, biomass, solar voltaics, wind, waste-to-energy (the RenewLA project), landfill gas, and geothermal.

Interestingly, DWP anticipates generating a significant amount of energy from the RenewLA project, but the level of certainty is so low that the DWP doesn't even count it in planning to meet its 2020 goals. Another interesting source of energy, although a small one, involves the use of "digester gasses" generated at the Hyperion Sewage Treatment Plant in El Segundo. These gasses, which are a byproduct of the sewage treatment process, are piped to the adjacent Scattergood electric generating plant, where the gasses are used as fuel to make steam to turn turbines to make electricity.

Valley VOTE Committee Reports

Metro/Universal Project – Richard Bort

Richard Bort reported that Valley VOTE's Executive Committee has approved submission of comments on the proposed Metro/Universal Project's draft EIR that basically oppose the project in its present form. The basis for opposing the project in its present form is that it would likely further exacerbate traffic on the nearby 170 and 134 freeways as well as on local surface streets in the area, despite some traffic mitigation provisions in the proposed project. The project presently calls for building two 24-story office towers and a 10-story parking structure, all located on MTA property above the Red Line station across Lankershim Blvd from the main entrance to Universal Studios. We also believe that the Red Line subway and the Orange Line busway will not carry a sufficient number of the commuters to the area to make a difference in the increased commuter traffic.

Airport Issues – Denny Schneider

Van Nuys Airport – The Noise Study (aka Part 161 study) to justify rejection of all older, noisy "stage 2" aircraft from landing at Van Nuys Airport is proceeding and will be finished early next year. It is no surprise that Bob Hope Airport objects to any reduction of aircraft coming to Van Nuys because they are concerned that any displaced aircraft will land at Bob Hope. The Part 161 study will get formal approval and also will restrict takeoffs from 10 PM instead of 11 PM as at present.

LAX – Today the Mayor released a new conceptual design to modernize LAX. It calls for full

upgrade of the Tom Bradley International Terminal, adds a people mover that circles the Central Terminal Area, and shows a new midfield terminal. Concurrently, LAWA told us that air traffic at LAX continues to decline and is expected to be at 59 million annual passengers by year end – an amount of traffic not seen since 1997. Air traffic at L.A.-owned Ontario International Airport has not fared any better and is down 14% to levels not seen since the new terminals were built there around 1996.

Palmdale Airport - LAWA has acknowledged that its prime role at Palmdale Airport is in jeopardy. United is pulling out in December and there will be no flights left. The City of Palmdale will be taking the lead on this airport while LAWA has promised continued support to them. Supervisor Antonovich and the rest of the LA County Supervisors have committed to helping the City of Palmdale to make PMD airport a reality.

Neighborhood Councils – George Truesdell

The Great ShakeOut demonstration and drill last week was followed on Sunday November 16, with the first annual North Valley Disaster Preparedness Event at the brand new Fire Station 87 on Balboa Bl. just south of Devonshire St.

Several organizations sponsored the event including Neighborhood Councils representing Granada Hills North and South, Northridge West and East, Porter Ranch, Lake Balboa, and North Hills West, as well as the Old Granada Hills Residents Group and the Knollwood Property Owners Association. The event included LAPD, LAFD, the Gas Company, DWP, CERT, Ham radio organizations, the Red Cross, SOS Survival Supplies and a schoolroom earthquake simulator. Also, a seismologist graphically explained just what we could expect in the “BIG one,” using a power point presentation. It was all quite a sobering experience. An estimated 400 to 500 people attended during the 3 hour event.

Many of the organizations handed out safety supplies, ranging from “What to Have on Hand Lists” to light sticks and face masks. The face masks were very welcome given the fires of the last few days, but the kids and some older folk also liked the light sticks.

The event’s leaders felt that people are finally becoming seriously concerned with the “Disaster” eventuality.

Also, Truesdell mentioned that the mayor is seeking input for the next year’s budget from neighborhood councils as well as the general public. He urged the public to fill out the mayor’s budget survey online at: www.lacity.org/, then click on “Proposed City Budget” next to the mayor’s photo; then in the left-hand column of the next page click on “Budget Survey.”

Affordable Housing – Vic Viereck

Vic Viereck expressed his view on the root cause of the present housing and mortgage crises, saying that political “termites” threaten the foundation of housing, but probably less than the approval of sub-prime loans. Housing prices have their normal peaks and valleys, he said, but the politicians’ push to make housing ownership more affordable has exacerbated affordability for many others. Pressuring Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to make financing easier for lower income people made the sub-prime loan problem contagious to the securities industry.

Viereck said, “The sub-prime loan debacle is a reminder that when a politician says ‘We’re here to help,’ (we should) run the other way. Unfortunately (again), the city’s housing policies are also a serious threat to the city’s fiscal health. When they talk about making housing affordable to the low income and middle class people, how many people are left to subsidize that? For at least the middle class it would be more of a transfer from one pocket to another, except what City Hall keeps for ‘overhead.’ Like with the sub-prime impact, pushing such redistribution is fiscally irresponsible.”

Los Angeles DWP Issues – Jack Humphreville

Jack Humphreville, on behalf of most Neighborhood Councils, is a leading advocate of

transparency and openness in the LADWP. He ardently calls for the appointment of a Rate Payers Advocate to review and analyze the operations, finances, and management of DWP, an organization with revenues that exceed the combined expense of Police and Fire Departments. The opacity of the LADWP and city government was amply demonstrated on November 7 when the City Council approved the "Green Power and Good Jobs" ballot measure for placement on the March 2009 ballot. He told Valley VOTE that this was a "back room" deal that had been in the works for the last two years, but that the DWP Board of Commissioners was informed only on Saturday before the recent announcement. There were no council hearings, no written reports that analyzed the cost of the project, and no meaningful or thoughtful input from DWP. Rather, DWP will be given a monopoly to install rooftop solar systems to generate electricity on residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental buildings throughout the city. While green power and good jobs are akin to motherhood and apple pie, the IBEW's high labor costs and related work rules will result in hundreds of millions of dollars of added cost, compared to the private sector, which will have to be paid for by the Rate Payers.

Mass Transit – Bart Reed

Bart Reed noted that in the November 4 election, both the statewide Proposition 1A and the L.A. City Measure R passed, although by very thin margins. Reed said that the High Speed Rail Project (Prop. 1A) will alleviate vehicular traffic in the L.A. metropolitan area by straightening and shortening the track between Palmdale and Sylmar, knocking about 30 minutes off the commute from the Antelope Valley into the San Fernando Valley. This surely will encourage many commuters to shift from cars to the train, he said. Reed was also pleased with the passage of the increase in the sales tax (Measure R), which will fund all kinds of highway improvements to reduce gridlock in the area.

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on **Monday, January 19, 2009**. Our featured speaker will **Councilmember Greig Smith**.

Please note there will be no meeting in **December**.

Happy Holidays!!

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](#)