



Meeting Report for May 18, 2009

by
Denny Schneider

Valley VOTE is a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations, 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. We meet monthly to address key policy issues and hear reports from our standing committee chairs. For additional information about Valley VOTE, for an upcoming meeting agenda, or for previous meeting reviews and press releases, we encourage you to go to the Valley VOTE website:

<http://www.ValleyVote.org>

Valley VOTE Board members, community leaders, and concerned citizens convened on **May 18, 2009** at **Galpin Ford** to hear featured speakers **David Hernandez** about Public Cable Access, and **Ben Austin and Louis Pugliese** on empowering parents in public education.

David Hernandez- on L.A. T.V. Public Cable Access Status

David Hernandez is a community activist who is very active throughout the Valley and region on numerous quality of life issues. Public Access TV is important to our democratic system as a method of distributing information. Because of the L.A. City budget cuts it is in jeopardy. Hernandez points out that we need to define objectives for Public TV and to ensure that it is facilitated.

A question was raised about where the Cable Franchise fees are spent. Hernandez said that about \$25 million (60% of the total amount collected) used to go to the City's Information Technology Agency (ITA) for broadcasting Channels 35 City Affairs & 36 Cultural programs with the rest going into the City's General Fund. Any money unused by ITA goes back to General Fund.

This year, Sacramento passed a law to control franchise fees. The City will no longer get the same franchise fee money. Time Warner now pays \$5 million to the City for infrastructure only and the City is responsible for running the studios. Any other cable fees are unrestricted and go directly into the general fund.

Hernandez noted that as of last January 1 Time Warner Cable closed its production studios to the public access. Dave Hernandez is part of a non-partisan group of "heavy hitters in LA" who have newly formed a non-profit, the Corporation for Public TV. They are seeking to develop 54 hours per week of programming, the amount needed to support 4 public channels. Without this amount of programming the availability of these channels will revert back to the cable companies and would be lost for public use. This non-profit intends to outfit four new production studios, in Van Nuys, West LA, East LA, and South LA. The first of these will be established in West LA this year by the nonprofit.

Ben Austin and Louis Pugliese- described how parents can influence educational system improvements by demanding change either from LAUSD or by installing charter schools in their local neighborhoods.

Ben Austin is executive director of the **LA Parents Union** which was instrumental in getting the **Green Dot Charter School** into Locke High School which showed dramatic improvements in student test scores. He was education deputy for Mayor Riordan.

Louis is a professor at CSUN who is an expert in educational psychology who has worked for LAUSD and run for school board in the past.

Mr. Pugliese questioned LAUSD achievement and spending policies. Mr. Pugliese told us that change must occur for two reasons. First, LAUSD pays large amounts for educational consultants to evaluate children's educational progress when teachers like him already have the skills and training. He was precluded from making assessments; concurrently he found an advertisement to join a consultant firm for the evaluation project at equivalent pay which would cost LAUSD more when consultant fees are added on top his salary. Second, teacher and staff expectations for many students are low and students are treated that way. He found a pervasive attitude where children are not encouraged, but verbally abused or indirectly called losers. He feels that parents can and should demand better. The answer, he says, is the LA Parents Union headed by Ben Austin.

Ben Austin said that better schools are an option if parents avail themselves. His organization works with charter companies like Green Dot to change the environment and modify how the money is spent. 50 percent of our children are failing. Parents need the political power to overcome bureaucracy and special interests. Austin is calling for parents of all races and economics to organize and demand better results. If 50 percent of the parents in a neighborhood and organize they can demand change using a threat to withhold their children. Either LAUSD changes or one of several viable Charter school non-profits such as Green Dot, the Alliance, or Bright Star will provide an alternative.

His organization worked with Green Dot to take over Locke High School, arguably the worst high school in LAUSD. They broke the school into smaller units and involved parents to help make decisions. They rehired many of the same teachers and added accountability at all levels. Teachers get higher pay. They demanded that LAUSD turn over all of the bureaucratic money received for their students and used it to make Locke school better. They operate on a 6% overhead instead of a 40% one so that more money is spent in the classroom. They have generally succeeded with improved test scores, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates.

Austin said that they are not anti LAUSD and just in favor of making all schools Charter. It's their goal to see LAUSD improve every school. He said it's not our problem that LAUSD has so much staff and a 500 page contract with UTLA. We are unionized at Locke, but a bad teacher, for instance, can be removed within three months. A paradigm change is essential to look at the impacts on the children first. If on the other hand a local LAUSD school is performing well, parents should send their children to it. Austin plans to send his child to his local elementary school.

Austin mentioned that Prop 39 guarantees space to Charter schools and that the current LAUSD building program is the biggest public works project in the nation. Yet LAUSD has a declining enrollment.

Parents can become the dominant special interest, not employees, not text book companies; children must come first. Pugliese noted that there is money available for tutors of underprivileged children under the federal no child left behind program but that they may only meet with these children off campus due to LAUSD policies. For more information see <http://www.parentsunion.org> .

Valley VOTE COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee Reports are summarized below. Each committee provides more detailed reports to meeting attendees.

Housing — **Vic Viereck** reported that the current rent controls are being implemented in a way that hampers owners from doing maintenance and improvements by limiting the recovery of costs to only a percentage of the money spent and by the amount of time it takes to get cost recovery rent approvals. He noted that present law encourages property redevelopment with a result in fewer affordable units.

Neighborhood Councils - The LA City budget was the major issue during the past month. Despite proposals

to cut funding to each Neighborhood Council to below \$12K per year, the budget proposal passed by the City Council cut NCs 10% to \$45K per year, an amount equivalent to other departments' cuts. The Valley NC Conference covering Citywide issues is coming on May 30.

LAWA— Denny Schneider reported that the money to fix LAX is very constrained. Important maintenance was deferred for years so that many costly repair projects are now required. The push to expand has not gone away; LAWA is seeking approvals in the near term for long term construction. The question of can the giant A380 aircraft land safely on the north is being analyzed, but it is noted that presently a large percentage of the individual landings are presently occurring on the north. LAX survived several small earthquakes on the Inglewood fault that occurred last week without significant damage.

Van Nuys “FAA Part 161” Study Update—Don Schultz is the vice chair of the VNY Citizens Advisory Council. They oppose the Bob Hope Burbank Part 161 request to close Bob Hope to all night flights and move 16 daily flights and 16 nightly flights to VNY. A “Part 161” is a formal request to the FAA for a change in flight operations. The Airport Noise and Capacity Act of 1990 prohibits airports from limiting take offs or landings (unless for safety) without FAA approval. Fortunately VNY had in place an ordinance to restrict stage two (loudest corporate jets and 707 aircraft) before the 1990 law was passed. The ordinance passed in LA before the 1990 law grandfathers the right for a limited phase out of the noisiest aircraft. This is currently being planned for implementation over a period of six years starting with the loudest stage two aircraft as old corporate jets. There are now over 100 corporate jets operating at VNY. The tower at VNY operates from as early as 5:45 a.m. and as late as 10:45 p.m.

The LA Board of Airport Commissioners also voted earlier in the month to increase gas tax fees for refueling aircraft at Van Nuys as an attempt to increase revenues.

Membership—Richard Leyner was attending another conference, but we noted that Valley VOTE is growing because it continues to be relevant to the quality of life of its members. An event will be coming in June. If you haven't mail your dues, please do so.

DWP Update - Richard Bort provided a detailed handout explaining how the water rate hikes are calculated. Meeting attendees said that they appreciated the clear, concise nature of the handout.

Jack Humphreville, part of the NC community oversight committee told the attendees that there is a never ending issue of attempted rate increases.

Since the failure of Measure B there is a change in the way City tax may be implemented. In favor of openness the approximately \$30M parcel property tax for storm water improvements was delayed until the item costs can be properly assessed and documented.

Jack noted that the City gets significant benefits from owning DWP. DWP provides about \$600M per year to the general fund. Along with the 10% utility tax collected there is a 7 percent (becoming 8 percent) transfer of power revenues to the general fund, it conducts many projects that align with other City requirements. Fire hydrant maintenance, for instance, is paid for by DWP and DWP will pay the City Fire Department \$1.5M to inspect them.

Jack will be reporting on the upcoming DWP budget in the near future. He noted that another push for a ratepayer advocate will be made.

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on Monday, **June 15, 2009** at **Galpin Ford**.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

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