

Committee Meeting  
was held:

March 1, 2023

At 8:00 pm

Virtual Meeting Teleconferencing  
and Phone Number For Public  
Participation

Zoom Online

Webinar ID: 810 3545 0769

**Committee Members:**

Chairperson Heath Kline,  
John Sandy Campbell, and  
August Steurer, and  
Aaron Williams

Contact Person:

Heath Kline

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## SPECIAL Meeting Minutes

• **Public Input on Agenda Items** – The public may address the Committee on any agenda item before the Committee acts on an item. The Committee will accept comments from the public on agenda items only when the Committee considers the individual item.

• **Public Input on Matters not appearing on the agenda** – During the General Public Comment period, the Committee listens to comments from the public on other matters not appearing on the agenda within the Committee's jurisdiction. \* Please note that the Brown Act prevents the Committee from acting on an issue you bring to its attention during the General Public Comment period; however, the issue raised by a public member may become the subject of a future Committee meeting.

• **Notice to Paid Representatives** - If you receive compensation to monitor, attend, or speak at this meeting, City law may require you to register as a lobbyist and report your activity. See Los Angeles Municipal Code §§ 48.01 et seq. More information is available at [ethics.lacity.org/lobbying](https://ethics.lacity.org/lobbying). For assistance, please contact the Ethics Commission at (213) 978-1960 or [ethics.commission@lacity.org](mailto:ethics.commission@lacity.org)

• **Public Comments are limited to two (2) minutes per speaker** unless adjusted by the presiding member of the Committee. As needed, the presiding member may impose different time limits per each agenda item.

### 1. Call to Order: 8:06 pm

### 2. Establish Quorum: (P=Present, A=Absent, E=Excused, R=Recused)

Julie Waltrip added to the Committee

Roll Call — Heath Kline (P), John Sandy Campbell (P), August Steurer (P), Julie Waltrip (P), Aaron Williams (P)

### 3. Comments by the Public regarding Issues NOT on the Agenda.

(2 minutes each)

Randal Mackay stated that he was auditing the meeting and thanking the committee for serving.

### 4. Approval of Available Committee Minutes

Available Minutes could not be pulled up for sharing on video. Continued to future meeting.

### 5. Agenda Items for Discussion and Possible Action by the Committee:

#### A. Request to Mayor to Increase Funding for Neighborhood Councils and Eligibility for Funding Rollover:

Continued Committee Discussion on motion for a CIS regarding NC Funding considering cost reductions and inflation impacting the purchase power of NCs.

A draft resolution was presented by Steurer and seconded by Waltrip.

The committee approved the following:

The WHIP committee recommends that the WHWCNC Board adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, when Neighborhood Councils [NCs] started, the Mayor's Los Angeles City Budget for 2003-2004 was 5.14 billion dollars. The last adopted the City of LA Budget for 2022-2023 is 11.8 billion dollars, which is 2.3 times as much, representing a 130% increase in the City Budget over 19 years; and,

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WHEREAS, in the 2003-2004 City Budget, Neighborhood Councils were allocated 50 thousand dollars and were allowed to roll over unused funds for two years; and,

WHEREAS, a 2023 allocation of budget dollars, equivalent to 2003-2004, would be 81.3 thousand dollars per NC. That is 1.63 times as much as in 2003-2004. Consequently, if past City Budget actions were fair to keep up with inflation, NC's should have seen a 63% increase in budget, which is, by comparison, less than half of the 130% the City Budget increase over the same period; and,

WHEREAS, for 2022-2023, the Neighborhood Councils have only a budget of \$32,000, with a maximum rollover of \$10,000 from the previous year. This amount represents a 36% decrease from the starting budget 19 years ago. However, this represents a 60% decrease in equivalent-dollar buying power after inflation; and,

WHEREAS, per the City Charter, the purpose of Neighborhood Councils is to engage the community to participate in City Government so that City agencies function better to serve the community. Achieving that purpose requires communicating with stakeholders bidirectionally in multiple ways, using more forms of media than when the Neighborhood Councils started; and,

WHEREAS, the cost of conducting in-person events/meetings has increased over time with inflation. In addition, the cost for NCs to meet in ADA-compliant facilities has limited the choices and has increased the direct cost of renting the facilities, plus many of the ADA-compliant facilities do not provide free parking, A/V equipment or tables and chairs, requiring the NCs to incur additional costs; and,

WHEREAS, the costs of implementing the various means of Neighborhood Council communications have increased because of the skills and technical services needed, training, media platforms used, needed equipment, and support services increase in cost/rates with inflation; and,

WHEREAS, to reach stakeholders today, printed media and postal mailing are still the best way to reach the maximum number of stakeholders. Counting on stakeholders to find neighborhood councils on social media or websites is impractical, particularly for seniors and community members who lack internet service. Printed media are complementary means leading to electronic communications; and,

WHEREAS, after expansive growth in our Neighborhood Council over two decades, 37 thousand addresses increased to 42,000. Postage for mailing newsletters rose from 20¢ to 55¢ each. Printing costs increased by about 40% and addressing the mail costs an additional 10¢. When a newsletter now costs about a dollar each (or \$42,000) to print and mail, on a \$32,000 budget, it is impossible to mail even one newsletter per year compared to when in the past it was possible to do multiple times annually; and,

WHEREAS, due to budget constraints that prevent NC's from undertaking larger and longer-term projects as they had in the past, many Neighborhood Councils like ours, with the knowledge and skill capacity to undertake significant outreach projects and community serving events, are now impaired from achieving our true purpose. Therefore, it compels us to spend our funds on less costly but less effective toward our Charter purpose Neighborhood Purposes Grants [NPGs] rather than lose what funding we have.

WHEREAS, there are multiple elements of budget inequity for diverse neighborhood councils, such as 10x population variation from less than 10,000 to over 110,000 along with extreme variation in capacity, public resources, and support; and,

WHEREAS, there is a personal financial holdings disclosure Form 700 from the California Fair Political Practices Commission. For the City of Los Angeles, members of Boards and Commissions that spend over \$70,000 annually must complete this form. This threshold has not increased with inflation since the beginning of Neighborhood Councils; and,

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THEREFORE, the Board of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council resolves to formally request that Mayor Karen Bass take steps to restore budget parity for Neighborhood Councils by increasing Neighborhood Council budgets up to \$69,999 as part of the City Budget and acting to 1) allow unlimited rollover of funds on a first-in-first-out basis and 2) initiate efforts for increasing the threshold for waiving the filing of Form 700 to accommodate NC members, who are only unpaid volunteers with no contracting authority.

FURTHERMORE, to restore budget parity with the initial years of NC budgets, consideration must be given to allocating base budgets of \$32,000 plus \$1 per resident, based on census counts, up to the maximum allowed.

FURTHERMORE, conduct a study on forces/reasons favoring NPG expenditures and what could be the negative impacts of establishing limitations on NPGs along with consideration of providing additional supplemental budgets to Neighborhood Councils based on variable circumstances such as underserved stakeholders and additional costs of facilities and communications. Furthermore, research whether larger well-functioning NCs like the WHWCNC break up to restore necessary per capita Stakeholder spending resources absent population and inflation-adjusted budget restorations.

FURTHERMORE, we request Council Member Bob Blumenfield, as Chair of the City Council's Budget, Finance, and Innovation Committee, to advocate and work collaboratively with Mayor Karen Bass and other members of the City Council in this regard.

*3 Ayes: Kline, Steurer, Williams. 2 Naye: Campbell, Waltrip*

### **B. Council Files 23-1200-S6: Appointment of a Board of Neighborhood Councils**

#### **Commissioner**

*Continued Committee Discussion on motion for a CIS regarding the process of selecting a nominee and vetting candidates with Neighborhood Councils.*

*A draft resolution was presented by Steurer and seconded by Williams.*

*The committee approved the following:*

The Woodland Hills – Warner Center Issues and Policies Committee recommends the following resolution-CIS:

WHEREAS, Mayor Karen Bass must submit a nomination for replacement of a Commissioner on the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners [BONC]; and,

WHEREAS, Mayor Karen Bass failed to consult with Neighborhood Councils on her previous submission of a nomination; and,

WHEREAS, members of Neighborhood Councils reached the consensus that consultation of Neighborhood Councils is necessary for a position that has a significant impact on the Neighborhood Council System; and,

WHEREAS, Neighborhood Councils need to have faith that the Commissioners will have the appropriate knowledge, experience, temperament, and judgment to benefit the system; and,

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WHEREAS, we believe the Mayor should allow Neighborhood Councils and their Alliances to nominate BONC candidates in their geographically designated area for commissioners to represent their interests and allowed to endorse a nomination or not;

THEREFORE, The Board of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council **RESOLVES** to advise the Mayor and all Members of the City Council that the Mayor’s Office should consult with Neighborhood Councils located in the region having a vacancy to find the best candidate for a Commissioner on BONC that they are willing to support.

*The vote was unanimous with 5 Ayes: Campbell, Kline, Steurer, Waltrip, Williams*

### **C. EmpowerLA vs Hollywood Studio District NC:**

*Continued work on a possible Board Statement of comment regarding the alleged EmpowerLA staff abusing the powers under “exhaustive efforts” to misuse funding as part of restoring the Neighborhood Council’s ability to function normally.*

*A draft resolution was presented by Kline and seconded by Waltrip.*

*The committee approved the following:*

The Woodland Hills Issues and Policies Committee recommends that the Board of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council adopt the following Resolution:

WHEREAS, the Hollywood Studio District NC [HSDNC] has had difficulty in achieving a quorum consistently due to board members moving outside the NC’s boundaries; and,

WHEREAS, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment [DONE] placed HSDNC into an “Exhaustive Efforts” process, which gave DONE control of HSDNC until the restoration of a functioning Board; and,

WHEREAS, for the purported purposes of recruiting new Board Members for the HSDNC, the DONE Empowerment Advocate [NEA], Mr. Mario Hernandez, directed and approved expenditures of \$4,000 one-eighth of the HSDNC annual budget to sponsor an event outside of the city limits, contrary to funding guidelines for a neighborhood council, whereby the NC must meet in their boundaries, and bypassing all the prior approval steps required for an NC sponsoring an event and protecting the City of Los Angeles from liability; and,

WHEREAS, the event was outside of HSDNC boundaries and outside the Los Angeles City limits. The proposal described it as an “annual youth event targeting children 7-17 with perhaps 25 adults in attendance conducted by the County Sheriff’s Youth Foundation. It failed to mention the actual location “in the City of West Hollywood [served by the Sheriff, not LAPD], a firm date, co-sponsors, liability insurance, or program-event details [all requirements to obtain pre-approval from the City of LA for an NC sponsored event]; and,

WHEREAS, according to communication from the (former) Board President & Secretary, the Board Members and Stakeholders of the HSDNC objected to sponsoring an event with an organization they did not support and presented their alternative recommendations for outreach activities and board member recruitment within the boundaries of the HSDNC. The Board strongly disagreed with Mario Hernandez on spending their money in a way that is not allowed and with an organization they did not support, to which he was indifferent to their objections and dismissed their alternatives; and,

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WHEREAS, Mr. Hernandez told the HSDNC board members that their attendance at the event was mandatory and that failure to attend would result in their removal from the Board. Mr. Hernandez has no authority to require mandatory attendance at an event outside of the City's Limits, which has the appearance of a board meeting, and,

WHEREAS, the event was for children and a small number of adults from the county and not focused on those necessarily from the HSDNC; and,

WHEREAS, the sponsored activity was a costly and untargeted way to recruit very few, if any, new board members, it would not be considered an acceptable Neighborhood Purposes Grant, an NC-sponsored event, or a suitable outreach event for the NC to participate in; and,

WHEREAS, we conclude this (repeated & documented) malfeasance of the Empowerment Advocate appears to serve an agenda separate from that of the Board of the Hollywood Studio District NC; and,

WHEREAS, nine of the eleven remaining HSDNC Board Members have resigned in protest to the inappropriate actions of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment; and,

WHEREAS, the actions on the part of DONE resulted in further damage to the Board of the HSDNC instead of rebuilding it;

**THEREFORE**, the Board of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council **RESOLVES** to communicate to DONE and appropriate City Officials:

- Mr. Mario Hernandez must be removed as the Empowerment Advocate for Hollywood Studio District NC. Pending further investigation, DONE must remove him from any role where he has contact with or decision-making authority over any NC. It must evaluate what rules Mr. Hernandez broke and decide whether he can continue in his position or as an employee of the City of Los Angeles; and,
- Both the City Attorney and the City Controller immediately open intented investigations into the events described in this Resolution (and supporting documents posted with this Resolution), including under what authority, if any, DONE and the City Clerk Funding Division authorized and spent \$4,000 with Sheriff's Youth Foundation in violation of the Brown Act, and Neighborhood Council funding guidelines and safeguards; and,
- If the investigations uncover that additional staff within DONE and the Office of City Clerk were complicit with Mr. Hernández's actions, they also need to be removed from City service; and,
- DONE must cancel and then return (from its funds if necessary) to HSDNC the improper, if not illegal, expenditures made by DONE; and,
- To initiate healing and rebuild trust with the HSDNC and Neighborhood Council members city-wide, DONE's Acting/Interim General Manager [AGM] – (the Mayor asked for and received the resignation of the former General Manager Raquel Beltran according to breaking news reports) must issue a Letter of Apology to the Community and affected former HSDNC Board Members and all Neighborhood Council members.
- In the AGM's apology letter, the recently resigned HSDNC board members must be offered and encouraged to return to their pre-resignation roles on the HSDNC with deference from every DONE staff member.
- The AGM must offer to meet personally with individuals and groups of HSDNC board members to hear their ongoing concerns and suggestions and develop collaborative solutions to address HSDNC issues.



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The AGM must commit to build up and strengthen the HSDNC to remove it from its EE status and be self-sustaining. As DONE created the problem, these efforts should be with the labor of DONE Staff, at the expense of DONE and not the HSDNC.

- While HSDNC is in EE status, DONE must honor the majority wishes and judgment of the HSDNC EE Board and not to substitute DONE's wishes and judgment. If the HSDNC EE Board does not have sufficient board members to establish a voting quorum of qualified, volunteer members to fill necessary board roles, then DONE must ask for and accept experienced NC board member volunteers from other NCs, vetted and approved by area NC alliance organizations, until sufficient HSDNC Stakeholders can be elected or appointed to fill those roles. In short, DONE and committed NC volunteers will not let the HSDNC fail.
- The AGM must offer to meet personally with individuals and groups of HSDNC board members to hear their ongoing concerns and suggestions and develop collaborative solutions to address HSDNC issues.

FURTHERMORE, the Board should inform Mayor of Los Angeles Karen Bass, City Councilmember CD 1 Eunisses Hernandez and Chair of the Neighborhoods and Community Enrichment Committee, City Councilmember CD 3 Bob Blumenfield, Los Angeles City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto, Los Angeles City Controller Kenneth Mejia, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment Acting General Manager, President, Board of Neighborhood Commissioners Ray Regalado of the WHWCNC Board's Resolution.

*Unanimous Vote: 4 Ayes: Campbell, Kline, Steurer, Williams    Absent (left at 9:30pm): Waltrip (A)*

### **6. Adjournment of Meeting: 9:50 pm**