



August 15, 2018

Council File 18-0467

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring Street, Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (“DLANC”) requests that the following Community Impact Statement be added in support of Council File 18-0467. DLANC appreciates the work the City has done to continue reforming the neighborhood council system, and welcomes the opportunity to comment on the most recent suite of reforms.

In general, DLANC agrees with the reforms to the neighborhood council system proposed by Council File 18-0467. The main goal of any neighborhood council—and the system as a whole—should be to represent their stakeholders. Consequently, DLANC is in favor of any reform that empowers neighborhood councils to voice the concerns of their stakeholders in distinct and meaningful ways. DLANC believes most of the reforms proposed here satisfy that standard. Namely, DLANC is in favor of synchronizing the names of the city departments tasked with governing neighborhood councils (and phasing out the “EmpowerLA” branding), eliminating the “selection” process, conducting a “one-time review process” of neighborhood council bylaws, instituting land use training, and allowing budget roll-over (with acceptable maximums and limits). Moreover, DLANC would like to emphasize that is especially in support of the proposals to eliminate restrictions on the ability of neighborhood councils to accept in-kind or monetary donations, hold the neighborhood council elections on the same day throughout the City, and developing a compendium of neighborhood council best practices.

At the same time, DLANC would like to express caution about a number of issues raised in this Council File. DLANC understands there have been issues with the definition of “community interest” stakeholder in the past, which has allowed the definition to be abused by voters who should not have been eligible. If the City decides to abandon the definition of “community interest” stakeholder in favor of specific additional definitions, such as “student or parent/guardian of a student,” it should be sure to include enough specific definitions to allow continued participation with all stakeholders. In other words, do not throw the baby out with the bath water. In particular, the City must establish a viable process for allowing homeless stakeholders to vote (even though they do not own property and may not have a job).

DLANC also believes the City should establish a uniform minimum voting age, and that that age should be set at 18 years old. Setting the minimum voting age at 18 rather than 21 distinguishes neighborhood council elections from other elections, and provides a special avenue for young stakeholders to engage in local politics. But setting the voting age at 16 risks complicating board membership and voting, as neighborhood council members under the age of 16 are not able to vote on all issues. As it did in its own bylaws, DLANC urges the City to set the minimum voting age at 18, while continuing to engage in outreach with younger community members to participate in neighborhood councils, such as through Committee membership or other volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, DLANC agrees that it is vital the City develop a better process to assist neighborhood councils with accessing shared public space in City facilities for meetings and events. Rent can absorb a substantial amount of a neighborhood council budget. And because DLANC has to rent a private space for its office and committee meetings, that space is usually closed to the public. DLANC believes that this undermines community participation in neighborhood councils. The City should prioritize allowing neighborhood councils to access space in City facilities to avoid that issue, and simultaneously give credibility to official government bodies.

Finally, DLANC greatly appreciates the proposal to develop a contact list of City agencies for use by neighborhood councils, but believes an amendment must be made. Namely, neighborhood councils should not be obligated to formally appoint a point of contact between their council and the bevy of city departments and agencies. While the Council File lauds this option as “creating a single line of communication,” the requirement that neighborhood councils limit their interaction with city departments and agencies to one, single point of contact will actually undermine communication. Under that rubric, contacts at city departments and agencies would not respond to any neighborhood council members who were not on their pre-approved contact list. Any neighborhood council member who is not a formally appointed point of contact would have to go through their own contact first, and then hope that person is able to touch base with the proper city department or agency contact, and then circle back with their own neighborhood council member. This system of back-and-forth will greatly undermine communication between the City and its neighborhood councils.

This Community Impact Statement is based on the recommendation of the Government Liaison Committee on July 18, 2018, and action taken at the Board of Directors meeting on August 15, 2018, when the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council adopted the following motion and directed that a Community Impact Statement be filed reflecting its position.

Motion: “The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (“DLANC”) should submit a Community Impact Statement in support of Council File 18-0467, which calls for broad reforms to the neighborhood council system. DLANC should submit the letter attachment posted with this Agenda in support of the Community Impact Statement.”

Sincerely,

Patricia Berman
DLANC President

Sincerely,

Nate Johnson
DLANC CCEAHC Co-Chair

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