

## Report on Valley VOTE Meeting on Monday, January 16, 2006 and Summary of 2005 Valley VOTE Highlights

**David DeVoss**  
**Newsletter Committee Chair**

After a one month holiday recess, Valley VOTE's Board members were joined by neighborhood council representatives and a broad assortment of community leaders for our first meeting of the year. The evening's invited speakers were LAUSD Board member Jon Lauritzen, a former teacher and Valley resident for more than 50 years, and LAPD Deputy Chief Michel Moore, a 24-year veteran of the force who is the San Fernando Valley's top cop.

### Valley VOTE Committee Reports

Prior to the presentations by Lauritzen and Moore, four Valley VOTE's committee chairs updated members on recent events.

Airport Committee chairman **Denny Schneider** reported a settlement to the LAX's Master Plan that temporarily halts airport expansion, and will result in redesign, save for the South Airfield Project to be built by controversial construction firm Tutor-Saliba. The three-year project adds a centerline taxiway between LAX's southern runways. In the past, Tutor has submitted low bids to obtain contracts whose total costs invariably increase because of change orders and cost overruns. Once again Tutor submitted an unusually low bid, but the new airport commission vows to monitor Tutor more closely this time. The only other new construction will be additional gates at the Bradley International terminal capable of handling the enormous new Airbus 380. Under the settlement agreement, LAX environmental protections will be increased and neighborhood groups' input is assured before any new airport expansion occurs.

Although the planned airspace redesign for Southern California is on hold, new noise monitoring and flight tracking systems will be installed this year at LAX, Van Nuys and Ontario airports.

Neighborhood Councils [NC's] are monitored by **Polly Ward**, who reported that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE) will sponsor a citywide Congress of NCs on June 17. The city charter calls for NCs to be evaluated every seven years. Left largely unspecified, however, is what should be studied and who should do the evaluation. The City Charter requires the Mayor and City Council to appoint a commission to evaluate neighborhood councils, the regulations under which they operate and the efficacy of the entire system. The city's Chief Legislative Analyst recommends that such a commission be organized immediately and hold open meetings for 12 months before issuing its final report. Among suggested topics for study: the definition of "stakeholder," the NC election process, an evaluation of DONE and ways to increase diversity and outreach of the councils.

Those Neighborhood Councils interested in joining the Neighborhood Council Congress that is currently in formation should visit [www.LANCCongress.org](http://www.LANCCongress.org). The website has a link to the Proposed Charter for the Congress of Neighborhood Council, and the Neighborhood Councils members that have joined to date.

**Richard Bort**, Valley VOTE's Finance Committee chairman reported that the city's annual business tax forms were mailed recently. Thanks in part to Valley VOTE recommendations made in a white

paper in 2003, this year's tax rates are reduced and small businesses with gross receipts under \$50,000 are exempt from tax payment entirely. Exempt businesses still must prepare and file their return before Feb. 28 to enjoy their exemption but, says Bort, "that's a small price to pay." Bort adds that next year the business tax threshold will climb to \$100,000.

Recently City Hall gave Time Warner Cable permission to acquire the Adelphia Cable TV franchises in LA. Valley VOTE has approved a report by the Finance Committee and sent it to the City Council and other interested parties. The nine-page position paper recommends the new renewal agreements reduce the franchise term from 15 to five years and allow "cafeteria pricing" to enable subscribers to pick and pay for only those channels they specifically want. Valley VOTE also recommends that Time Warner's existing "on demand" service be used to broadcast taped city and neighborhood council meetings, significant press conferences and meetings of civic organizations such as the Valley Industry and Commerce Association and Valley VOTE.

Valley VOTE Treasurer **Victor Viereck** presented an alarming set of statistics to show that well intentioned but impractical restrictions imposed by the Rent Stabilization Ordinance(RSO) on rent increases are endangering the city's dwindling stock of low cost apartments. "Aging buildings require more than occasional repairs," says Viereck, "but parts of the ordinance are so punitive that apartment owners can't afford to make the necessary renovations to roofing, plumbing and walkways."

Based on a 2003 study, it would cost \$2 billion to bring RSO properties in lower income communities up to standard. There are about 600,000 RSO units in this category making the average cost of renovation and repair around \$17,000 per unit. Unfortunately, city regulations cap rent increases on these types of apartments to such an extent that it is a financial loss for owners to make repairs. The investment vs. return equation is even more tenuous for those who must borrow at prevailing rates to make improvements.

"The loss of rent during the project, along with relocation assistance is not even included in these costs," says Viereck. "These unaffordable costs will continue to cause older apartments, the city's best resource of affordable units, to deteriorate, be destroyed and disappear."

### **LAUSD Board Member Jon Lauritzen**

It's difficult to defend a school district that allows half of its entering high school students to drop out before graduation. But LAUSD Board member Jon Lauritzen did exactly that at this week's meeting. "Yes, we lose a few," Lauritzen conceded, quickly adding that some drop outs do return for adult education programs leading to a diploma. That 7,000 of the 30,000 high school seniors scheduled to graduate this May have been unable thus far to pass an exit exam measuring 10th grade skills is somewhat disturbing, he admits. "But every student who graduates now has to pass algebra." Intensive mentoring and additional testing should insure that all except some 1,500 will receive a diploma.

On a much brighter note Lauritzen noted that the Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies has a zero drop out rate and that Cleveland High graduates 96% of its students.

Additional school construction now possible because of the recent bond issue means that forced bussing soon will be history. "The only students on busses will be those attending magnets," he says. The new construction also means a return to the traditional school year. The Valley is receiving eight to ten new schools. West Hills will get a new elementary school. So will Porter

Ranch. A new middle school is going up near the old Laurel Plaza shopping center and a new high school for North Hollywood eventually will be built at Vineland and Chandler next to the Metro station.

There are so 80 charter schools within the LAUSD boundaries and many parents are pushing for more, but Lauritzen urges caution. Because charters are managed autonomously at the school level and not subject to all the district rules it's much easier for a student to be expelled for disciplinary problems. "Regular public schools have to take every youngster. It takes drugs or weapons before we actually expel a student."

Recently LA Controller Laura Chick offered to audit the LAUSD. Officials greeted her proposal like a vampire viewing the rising sun. "We're not opposed to Chick doing a financial audit or studying our administrative structure, but she wants to go on a fishing expedition," says Lauritzen. He adds that LAUSD may allow a city audit sometime in the future. "The state requires us to do a financial audit every year. We have a contract with KPMG, which charges \$1.2 million for the audit. Chick wants to charge \$800,000 so I'd rather pay her than KPMG."

### **LAPD Chief Michel Moore**

He was a sergeant in the Foothill Division, a vice cop in Van Nuys and a North Hollywood detective. Yes, the Valley's top cop has been around the block more than a few times. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why crime is falling so dramatically in the San Fernando Valley. Last year, crime was down 15.9% in the Valley. This comes on the heels of a 10% reduction in 2004.

"This results from the fact that cops count. " says Moore. "We're out there like never before."

So what is the LAPD doing differently? One is Project Scarecrow. It consists of leaving an unmanned salvaged black & white patrol car parked in a high crime area. The cars are moved often enough so that potential criminals believe they are being actively monitored. Another tactic is to have reserve officers drive with their lights on through crime-plagued neighborhoods. Another tactic that has been successful over the hill in Macarthur Park is to install closed circuit cameras that feed video into a nearby police station. Also under consideration is an equestrian contingent of mounted reserve officers who will patrol neighborhoods along the Valley's semi-rural perimeter.

Moore says the LAPD hopes to add 250 officers this year. Added manpower will allow more attention to be paid to specific locations. Says Moore: "Sixty percent of the crime occurs in 10% of the locations."

### **Final Note**

Recently, Valley VOTE mailed out 2006 membership pledges. President **Joe Vitti** encourages all Valley VOTE members to pay their dues promptly and to ask their interested neighbors to join the organization and attend our informative monthly meetings. Membership dues start at \$20. Please contact Vic Viereck for further information at [vicviereck@sbcglobal.net](mailto:vicviereck@sbcglobal.net)

**Valley VOTE** is committed to exploring and implementing programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley, including opportunities to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters. Your time, opinions, and financial assistance aid in furtherance of this goal.

## Valley VOTE Highlights of 2005

### Featured Guest Speakers at Monthly Meetings

Antonio Villaraigosa was the last of the major mayoral candidates to speak. He presented his "Plan for the Valley" speech in February 2005.

Los Angeles City Council members Tom LaBonge, Wendy Greuel, Alex Padilla, Greig Smith, Tony Cardenas, and Dennis Zine were featured speakers bringing us up to date on L.A. City Council issues.

City Controller Laura Chick, LAUSD Board member Jon Lauritzen and State Assembly member Cindy Montanez were also featured guests.

Along with : Devon Cichoski-Metro Orange Line; Mark Dierking – Director of the Children's Museum; Jeannette Gayer – Consumer Advocate; Valerie Olive – Greater Valley N.C.; Kristen Sabo – Greater Griffith Park N.C.; Bernadette Soter – Griffith Park Master Plan; Bill Toutant – Dean CSUN; Catherine Reeves – CSUN; Judy Kudson – CSUN; LynnHarris – SCAG; Garrett Biggs – Consultant.

### Press Releases on Major Issues in 2005

1] Opposed the proposed increase of ½% in the Sales Tax for the city of Los Angeles to provide a revenue source for the hiring of police officers. (February)

2] Endorsed the Intra-City Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Certified Neighborhood Councils and the Department of Water and Power approved by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Board of Commissioners on April 5, 2005. Valley Vote will monitor the LADWP's activities toward meeting it's commitments under MOU.(April)

3] Supported the appointment of **Valeria Velasco**, by Mayor Villaraigosa, to the Los Angeles World Airports Board of Airport Commission. (August)

4] Opposed the use of any City of Los Angeles taxpayer funds, including waiver of room tax or any other tax or fee, for the purpose of financing a hotel near the convention center, or elsewhere in the city. (September)

5] Supported Council member **Greig Smith's** plan entitled Recovering Energy, Natural Resources and Economic Benefit from Waste for Los Angeles (RENEW LA). This 20 year plan is designed to build environmentally safe conversion technologies that will recover and recycle over 90% of the city's waste by 2025. (October)

6] Supported eight recommendations provided to the L.A. City Council for the Cable Television Franchise Renewal negotiations. (December)

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