

Valley VOTE
March 20, 2006 Meeting Report
by
David DeVoss

The calendar said it was the first day of spring, but outside Galpin Ford's meeting room incessant rain had turned the Valley's streets into swirling streams. Despite the weather, more than two dozen civic leaders and concerned citizens assembled for Valley VOTE's monthly meeting. The attraction: **Julie Korenstein**, LAUSD's senior board member who has represented the San Fernando Valley for 19 years.

The massive Los Angeles Unified School District covers 700 sq. miles and contains parts of 27 cities. Over one million students (counting pre-schoolers and adults) walk through its doors every day. Knowledgeable and articulate, Korenstein is an expert on LA public education. But before she began Valley VOTE committee leaders made brief presentations.

Robin Gilbert, San Fernando coordinator of the California Clean Money Campaign, noted that on March 14th, the L.A. City Ethics Commission voted to endorse a system of clean money for campaigns for city offices. In Sacramento, state campaign financing reform has been approved by the Assembly and is being reviewed by Senate Committees. People in favor of clean money reforms are urged to write their state representatives in support of AB 583. There is an online letter-writing tool on the CCMC website **www.Caclean.org**.

Further information available on the website or call (800) 566-3780.

Safe at Home?

Can the government take your home? Yes, says Housing Committee chairman **Victor Viereck**. The process of Eminent Domain takes private land for public use in return for "just" compensation. But is demolishing your house in order to build a Wal-Mart really in the public interest?

"In June 2005 eminent domain came into public focus nationally through the United States' Supreme Court Kelo decision," says Viereck. "In that decision, the court held that commercial economic development can constitute a public use for which eminent domain may be exercised. It upheld New London Connecticut's economic redevelopment plan, which called for the potential use of eminent domain to revitalize the economically depressed town by creating community improvements, including commercial and retail space.

"While eminent domain for economic benefit is supposed to be reserved for "blighted" areas, different people have different views of what is blighted. With California's Proposition 13, some developers and elected officials may salivate over redeveloping properties that have not changed ownership in decades, keeping the assessed property value very low compared to market."

In California, legislation to limit the use of eminent domain to such traditional public projects as highways and schools wound up stuck in committee thanks to the influential California Redevelopment Association and the state's league of municipalities.

California **State Senator Tom McClintock** and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association will be gathering signatures for a November 2006 ballot initiative. It would amend California's constitution to include the limits fruitlessly sought by last summer's stalled legislation. Says Viereck: "We need

to promote the initiative, and get it on the ballot."

Monitoring LA City government can be a depressing task. But **Denny Schneider**, Valley VOTE's emissary to the Los Angeles World Airports Authority is all smiles thanks to the new attitude on the part of airport commissioners appointed by **Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa**.

Mayor Villaraigosa is keeping his pledge to stop growth at LAX and to develop a true regional strategy," says Schneider. At a meeting two weeks ago to collect public input on LAX's Specific Plan, the Mayor cautioned not to expect miracles; LAX is not shrinking from its present size nor is traffic and all noise going away. But he then added, "You can expect a convenient, world class airport in Los Angeles. Along with LAX improvements, we are working to improve traffic with an expanded Flyaway program. There is a new fly-away now operating from Union Station to LAX and another is planned to support Ontario airport."

LAX has set aside the coming 32 months for public hearings. An independent "community advocate" position also will be created to provide a voice for those impacted by LAX operations. **Mike Doucette**, Chief of Planning, introduced breakout sessions to obtain detail suggestions and inputs from individual community members. To stay current on the situation at LAX and other airports go to <http://www.laxmasterplan.org>.

Rim of the Valley

During his first term, **Councilman Alex Padilla**, a native of the Valley and a horseman, devised a plan to expand horse trails so the general public as well as urban cowboys could use them. The vision, says **Pauline Tallent**, who heads our Land Issues committee, was called the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Padilla contributed \$50,000 from his office budget to create a master plan that would link trails with the Valley's parks. Certain parcels of land were identified as missing links necessary to this connectivity.

"The Infrastructure Bond includes funds earmarked for the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which is the lead agency for the Rim of the Valley Corridor," says Tallent, "but there is growing urgency as development is starting to encroach on these trails. Also there is some opposition from landowners with property adjacent to the trails.

At the behest of Congressmen **Brad Sherman** and **Howard Berman**, the National Park Service recently initiated a three-year study on possibly expanding the current trail system. But property rights advocates have persuaded some Senators to withhold support and in the **House Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Tracey)** has kept supportive legislation from even reaching committee.

Polly Ward monitors Neighborhood Councils for Valley VOTE. She says Neighborhood Councils and stakeholders have just a few weeks to make recommendations to the City Council on the scope and structure of the Neighborhood Council Review Commission, also referred to as the 912 Commission. The city charter calls for this commission to evaluate the "efficacy of the system of neighborhood councils no later than seven years after the adoption of the Charter." Those with creative ideas about how such a commission should be structured should contact **Alex Padilla** ASAP since the new commission is scheduled to start **July 1,2006**.

People Moving

Back in October 2004 the city approved FlyAway service from Sylmar to LAX, but 18 months later not a single bus has hit the road, says Bart Reed, executive director of The Transit Coalition. The

lack of a functioning terminal results, in part, from a suspicious land deal in which the city acquired an isolated plot of land. Los Angeles World Airports objects to putting its FlyAway terminal in this barren cul-de-sac.

In other news, the MTA has approved a rush hour only Metro Rapid bus for the Sepulveda corridor. It also is looking into building a public access tunnel from the Red Line depot to Universal City. There also are plans to hold a San Fernando Valley Great Pumpkin Half-marathon this coming October 29 to mark the one-year anniversary of the Orange Line. The race would take place on the busway, which would be closed for several hours. Although he does not object to the notion of a mini-marathon, Reed questions the advisability of making it more difficult for working commuters to reach their Sunday morning jobs. "More than 8,000 people ride the Orange Line on Sunday," says Reed. "I'm not enthusiastic about shutting it down for five hours."

After years of false starts the MTA finally has a \$3.6 million plan to renovate the 1896 Lankershim train depot. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the depot will remain at the corner of Lankershim and Chandler boulevards since the land has been targeted by politically connected developers. People fearing that a relocated structure will lose prominence and historical accuracy have started a Save the Depot committee. To learn more visit www.thetransitcoalition.us.

Diversity's Downside

It's no secret that LAUSD has problems. And most of them were directly addressed by a surprisingly candid **Julie Korenstein**, who made the following points:

"Teaching LAUSD's 727,000 students is complicated by the fact they speak 86 different languages. Indeed, 43% of the students - about 300,000 - are not fully proficient in English. In addition, 78% of LAUSD students are at or below the poverty level, which for a family of four means earning less than \$20,000 a year.

"Because of endemic poverty, LAUSD serves 500,000 free meals every day. Only the U.S. military and the New York City public schools serve more free meals than LAUSD.

"Seniors need to pass an exit exam to receive a diploma. Of the 30,000 seniors who have taken the exam, 24,000 have passed. What happens to the remaining 6,000? Some educators advocate giving students who have taken classes necessary to graduate but failed the exit exam a "certificate" instead of a "diploma." The school board is resisting the idea.

"LA Unified is building 180 new schools, 55 of them in the San Fernando Valley. It is the largest school construction project in the history of the U.S.

"Despite opposition from UTLA, the charter school movement is growing. LA has 97 charter schools with 35,000 students enrolled. The entire state of New York only has 100 charter schools.

"Fifty percent of the students starting high school drop out before graduation. Not so, says Korenstein. The drop out rate is 24.6%.

"Should the mayor of a city running a \$280 million deficit also take on the responsibility of managing its public schools? "Antonio should fill pot holes in a timely manner and solve the homeless problem," says Korenstein. "He hasn't a clue what he's getting himself into (if he assumes control of LAUSD)."

"I have never opposed the San Fernando Valley having its own school district," she says. " I'm in favor of one school district for the Valley."

A Friendly Reminder

Valley VOTE annual dues of **\$20** are due. Please renew your membership so our organization can continue to serve the people of the San Fernando Valley. Mail your check to:

Valley VOTE

14622 Ventura Blvd.

#424

Sherman Oaks, Ca. 91403

Thanks for your continued interest and support. Please be sure to provide us with your current address.

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 implementing programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, including opportunities to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters.

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