

Valley VOTE
Report of July 17, 2006 Meeting



Councilmember Jack Weiss

Earlier this week Valley VOTE members were joined by a dozens of community leaders and neighborhood activists who had come to hear City Councilman Jack Weiss, a former federal prosecutor whose West Los Angeles district also includes portions of Encino and Sherman Oaks. "I'm technically a politician but I'm not someone who gets his life blood and energy out of being a part of LA City government," Weiss confided. "I want to get in fast, get it done and make a difference. I'm not a lifer and I don't want to be."

Weiss may not be a lifer, but he did run for a second term last year. What will he do now that he's reelected? "Work with the mayor to come up with a more modern police recruiting strategy," he says. "One thing that has depressed (police) recruiting is that the (government funding) spigot has been turned on and off. By having the spigot permanently on people will gravitate back (to police work)."

Weiss is concerned about the lack of affordable housing, but he does not believe abolishing rent control will happen. Instead he says the city's policy will be to continue to provide public assistance to developers who build affordable housing. Community groups sometimes complain that too often developers are allowed to deviate from established zoning plans. To this Weiss says simply: "The reality is that every zoning scheme comes with built in conditions, exceptions and rules that allow discussions between the developer and the community. We try to find a middle ground."

But what if a neighborhood's opinions about density and traffic mitigation differ from those of developers? Weiss says that the middle ground he seeks probably will be covered with taller, more densely packed buildings. "There's no part of the city of LA that's an island," he says. "Island time is over. We're all interconnected."

As for clean money campaigning, Weiss admits to being as skeptic. "I understand and admire the sentiment for clean money, but there are plenty of folks - you can call them the special interests - whose money is a rather large thumb on the scales of democracy." The Supreme Court, attorney Weiss reminds us, has ruled that the rich have a free speech right to give unlimited contributions to "independent expenditures", and it is this money, he admits, "that moves the needle in elections."

Valley VOTE has several standing committees whose leaders report monthly on events of local interest. On Monday the following summaries were presented.

Come Fly With Me

Denny Schneider, Valley VOTE's emissary to Los Angeles World Airports, reports that to make airport travel more convenient for people in the Valley, LAWA is initiating a six month pilot program for the "VNY FlyAway Bus" from Van Nuys Airport to Burbank's Bob Hope Airport. It will be similar to the currently operation in which Valley residents board a comfortable, air conditioned bus to be delivered to LAX for a nominal cost. Over the next several years additional destinations will be added.

Present US law prohibits an airport operator from restricting the number and kinds of flights into their facility as long as the facility can safely handle that aircraft. Only the FAA is empowered to order air traffic restrictions. LAWA is preparing support for an FAA Part 161 study/approval for Van Nuys Airport to ban the louder "Stage 2" aircraft (such as old 707s) from operating at Van Nuys airport. A Part 161 study is a long and involved process that takes several years to complete, but it is a move in the right direction for those impacted.

TV Guide

Cable operators have agreed to support AB 2987, the Fabian Nunez bill that shifts all video franchising from the local to the state level, says Richard Bort, chairman of Valley VOTE's Finance Committee. This will allow telephone companies to compete with cable companies in delivering video programming. Although the bill provides for local entities to continue to receive five percent franchise fees, the method of calculation may change. City and county authorities are concerned that they are losing control; activist groups are concerned that their public access channels will no longer be available. Valley VOTE is concerned that Time Warner Cable will no longer have incentive to meet our request for on-demand service that would carry video tapes of city council, committee, and commission meetings, neighborhood council meetings, press conferences, and the like.

Meanwhile, Comcast and Time Warner have signed a revised contract to jointly purchase the assets of Adelphia Communications Corp. The deal calls for the acquisition to close by July 31, 2006. The U.S. Bankruptcy judge has approved the sale of assets by Adelphia to Time Warner and Comcast. The Federal Communications Commission is expected to approve the transaction as well by July 31, 2006.

Billion Dollar Bonds

Prior to 1986 Los Angeles never had any persistent shortage of affordable housing. But in 1979 L A's Rent Stabilization Ordinance (rent control), started. Owners who want or need to improve or make major repairs immediately lose at least 40% of their investment, while it takes at least six years to recover the remaining 60%. When tenants have to vacate their units to make rehab possible, the owner has to pay relocation assistance that, in many cases, amounts to a refund of at least a years rent. It's the only industry, notes Valley VOTE treasurer Vic Viereck, that requires owners to refund over a year's (sales) rent just to stop doing business with them.

Unable to pass along the costs of improvements, owners of apartment buildings in more affluent neighborhoods have been evicting tenants and converting their structures to condominiums. "After busloads of tenants descended on City Hall the council entertained a motion to place a moratorium on condo conversions notes Valley VOTE's Land Use Committee head Pauline Tallent, "but this action does not address the main reason for the conversions."

The 1986 federal Tax Reform Act eliminated investors' opportunity to use rental housing as a tax shelter, and initiated Passive Loss Restrictions which discourage investment in rental housing. California's legislature followed suit.

Now that government has effectively caused the ongoing housing shortage, Los Angeles' Mayor and City Council want a Billion Dollar Bond issued to subsidize "affordable housing." What is wrong with the Billion Dollar Bond?

*The \$15 tax per hundred thousand assessed value would make all homes less affordable.

*Prices on all products and services provided from Los Angeles real estate would have to be increased to cover the tax.

*Lower income people would be subsidizing more affluent people.

*The tax exempt status of many of the subsidized buildings would erode the tax base.

*The bond funds would be like a pot-of-gold to elected officials looking for campaign contributors. That's not "Clean Money Campaigning."

Clean Money... To Be or Not...

The Clean Money and Fair Elections initiative was certified by California's Secretary of State on June 26 and will be on the November ballot as Proposition 89, reports Robin Gilbert, San Fernando Valley coordinator of the California Clean Money Campaign. Financed by a 0.2% increase in corporate taxes, the initiative not only would institute full public funding of campaigns but also require candidates to appear in primary and general election debates.

Last week, the LA City Council made their sentiments known, voting to call the campaign funding concept "full public financing" instead of "clean money" in a study that will be examining the plan for Los Angeles City Elections.

912 Commission Report

Joe Vitti, appointed by Greig Smith to represent Council District 12 on the 912 Commission, gave an overview of some of the issues the Commission will be reviewing in the following year. As you may recall this city charter mandated commission is charged with evaluating the efficacy of the neighborhood council system. Vitti briefly highlighted some of the items that the commission will consider as outlined in the City Ordinance 177535. They are: A. Definition of "stakeholder"; B. Outreach to assure the councils represent the demographics of their district; C. The effectiveness of the Early Notification System; D. The training process for N.C. members; E. Funding and Budgetary issues; F. Manner in which N.C.'s work together; G. Manner in which they work with Councilmembers; H. Accomplishments of N.C.'s; I. Challenges of N.C. elections; J. Accountability of N.C.'s , government officials and City officers; K. The NC's role as related to DONE, BONC, and other City offices; L. The role of MOU's with City departments.

The commission will be meeting 2 times a month on the first Thursday and third Tuesday in the evening at various locations around the city. Public comment is welcome. The next meeting will be on August 3, 2006. Location to be determined. To automatically receive agendas by e-mail, sign up at <http://parc3.lacity.org/ens/index.cfm>.

Noteworthy

After decades of building cafeterias that serve food students reluctantly buy and grudgingly eat, LA's Community College District finally will seek competitive bids from contractors interested in building food courts, says Valley VOTE Executive Committee member Richard Leyner. The move should produce an infusion of cash - and better food.

Save the date: October 5, 2006. That when the United Chambers of Commerce will hold their second annual Mayor's Day luncheon at the Marriott Hotel in Woodland Hills. For \$40 you can meet and break bread with Antonio Villaraigosa and other mayors from Burbank, Agoura, Santa Clarita and other Valley area cities.

And Finally

Your Moment of San Fernando Valley Zen



Yes, this was the San Fernando Valley some 40 years ago.
Can you spot Beaver Cleaver's house?
It used to be located on the middle ground.

Newsletter Editor
David DeVoss

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on Monday, August 21, 2006

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.

Please forward this Email to interested individuals and organizations. If you would like to be removed from our distribution list please send an Email to javittisr@cs.com. We apologize if you receive more than one notice for this meeting.

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