

Valley VOTE

Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment

September 15, 2014 Meeting Report

by

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Labor's Friend



Paul Koretz, Fifth District Councilman

Fifth District councilman Paul Koretz represents Encino in the City Council. But his heart probably lies on the other side of the hill — along with the bulk of his district. Though born in Sun Valley, he is

proudest of helping start the City of West Hollywood. Serving on the council's budget committee, Koretz has made himself proficient in audits and government efficiency. He hopes to eliminate LA's business tax, but he admits the process will take years since the city must find \$470 million in new revenue to replace the sum it will lose when the business tax disappears.

Koretz is a proud Democrat who often refers to himself as a "friend of labor." He loves serving on the City Council. "It's a pleasure because we don't have a lot of Republicans," he smiles. He's a strong supporter of increasing the minimum wage arguing, quite rightly, that increased compensation will lift thousands of people out of poverty while insisting, somewhat implausibly, that illegal immigrants receiving higher wages will spend the extra money in Los Angeles instead of sending their new disposable income south of the border. Koretz admits that businesses forced to pay higher wages will have to increase the price of their products. Says Koretz: "I'm inclined to think that if the poorest among us — some 25% of the city's population — have money to purchase things the economy will improve." Asked what LA plans to do to bring in higher-paying jobs, Koretz replies, "I don't think I have an answer on that." His hope is that better municipal management will save city jobs.

When the subject turned to the LA 2020 Commission Report, *A Time for Action*, Koretz unexpectedly turned hostile. "I didn't ask for the recommendations and I don't feel compelled to respond to them," he said. "I didn't think it was that brilliant a project to begin with. (The report) talks about problems we know we already have and suggests solutions that are not viable."

The city's most intractable problem may be the one over which it has no control. "The drought is very serious," he says. "The MWD built three years of storage but that's half used up. We have a polluted aquifer in the Valley." Increased recycling of gray water could reduce the amount of water used on residential landscaping. Israel, he says, recycles 90% of its water while Los Angeles manages only a small percent. Crumbling infrastructure in the form of DWP water mains is an equally serious problem. "DWP is on a 300-year replacement cycle when it comes to old pipes. If Los Angeles were to go to a 100-year replacement cycle excavations would block every street and

bankrupt taxpayers.”

Old Man River



Richard Fisk of Grenada Hills

When Grenada Hills stalwart Richard Fisk speaks, Valley VOTE listens. Fisk’s topic at the September meeting was the LA River and the plan advanced by the Army Corps of Engineers to restore the river’s riparian ecosystem.

The LA River is a 51-mile waterway that runs from Canoga Park to the Pacific through a 870-sq. mile watershed that includes the Santa Monica, Verdugo and San Gabriel Mountains. In the 1930s, following a series of floods, the Corps turned the river into a concrete channel. La’s population was 1.2 million at that time. Today LA has a population of 4 million and many people would like the waterway returned to its original state at a cost of \$1.1 billion. Half of that sum will come from Washington, but it is far from certain that LA can afford the balance.

The Corps proposes and the city agrees to reconnect the river to major tributaries while maintaining the existing level of flood risk management. The river would be widened and allowed to meander naturally to reshape the adjacent floodplain. A primary goal is to improve recreation amenities. To achieve this a substantial amount of land must be purchased and at least three bridges relocated at a cost of \$20 million. LA has plenty of water to put in the river. At present, 70% of the flow comes from reclamation plants.

Much of the land designated for recreation will be land presently zoned for industrial use. An unknown amount of money will be needed to remove toxic waste from the land. Also removed will be hundreds of blue collar jobs. The Corps says an “irreversible loss of employment opportunities in the downtown industrial area of Los Angeles” will accompany the creation of 125 acres of marshland.

Fisk does not dismiss the proposed improvements to the river but he questions “spending more than \$500 million of city money on something that once was but in reality can never come back. The city should not be doing projects that aren’t coordinated and ignore the basic objective of improving the city and its environment for the people of Los Angeles.”

Executive Committee Reports

Bart Reed – Transit

You probably have heard about the Metro Green Line not providing direct transit to Los Angeles International Airport. It has been a planning faux pas for generations. Now, imagine that Metro is addressing a long needed project and has finally funded and is going to build a direct tunnel connection between the Red Line and the Orange Line in North Hollywood. However there are several major kinks in the plans and construction is about to start, which will probably result in a project that doesn't meet community needs.

Transit Coalition, along with Valley VOTE and the Mid-Town North Hollywood Neighborhood Council are asking Metro to halt the start of construction until the current design of the Orange Line — Red Line Pedestrian Tunnel can be altered to include recommendations that the new portal include two escalators (one going up and one going

down, addressing egress and ingress); and the retention of the current crosswalk on Lankershim Boulevard between the two stations as this crosswalk provides the most direct connection to the stations and more than a dozen curbside bus lines. Retention will accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, ADA commuters, senior citizen in a superior fashion. The designs proposed by Metro show inadequate planning, community outreach and insufficient design to service the community.

In a related matter, residents from the North San Fernando Valley have difficulty connecting to schools, jobs and medical facilities in the Santa Clarita Valley, as there is no bus service connecting the two regions. The lack of connectivity is an important issue that must be addressed immediately in order to provide accessibility to institutions that offer services.

An executive order by former Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa is costing taxpayers millions of dollars by preventing city departments and agencies from doing construction on major roads during morning and evening rush hours. Denying the Dept. of Water and Power the ability to service electrical and water systems during commute hours costs residents more than \$20 million a year.

Vic Viereck - Taxes

An Agenda item voted upon in August at a City Council meeting would increase property tax on commercial property in California, and repress business, jobs and income tax revenue even further. In a city known for its anti-business climate, approving increased property tax (through split-roll) on commercial property is a job killer. In its lack of wisdom, City Council members voted 14 - 1 to approve support for the state-wide split roll property tax measure. I thank Council member Mitch Englander for being the one member to oppose the job killer.

Although the property owner writes the check to pay the property tax, it's the tenants who pay the property tax. There are multiple reasons not to increase the cost of doing business. Restricting property tax increases makes California businesses more competitive with out-of-state and foreign businesses. It also helps make merchandise and

services more affordable for consumers. If tax increases, like other costs, cannot be covered through sales revenue, other costs need to be cut. That means eliminating jobs. Eliminating jobs, along with reducing (if possible) other expenses hurts the whole economy. While some businesses would have to close, others will not open. That hurts employment.

That particular split roll item is not the one that has a “loophole” in the revaluing of property upon a change of ownership. The one with the claimed “loophole” died in the California Senate. Increased property tax also reduces net taxable income for state (& federal) income tax purposes, and reduces property values. It’s not just big corporations, but everybody who would suffer the impact of the proposed split-roll. Please protect our economy by rejecting the split-roll.

Denny Schneider – LAX

Forty years ago, LAX was supposed to open a Green Line train to the airport. But it stopped a couple miles short requiring people to take a connecting bus from the station at Imperial and Aviation. This lapse makes the MTA a joke. When asked if mass transit service would ever arrive at LAX, my wife Nan used to quip, “Of course, and it will look just like a great big blue bus.”

A decade ago, voters authorized a \$100 million bond to extend the train to LAX. But though money is being spent no rail connection is in sight. The Crenshaw-LAX MTA line now under construction does not go into LAX. In its place Los Angeles World Airports proposed an innovative concept station, intermodal transport, and check in facility near Lot C adjacent to LAX. This station provides potential for train expansion along Sepulveda or Lincoln into the Westside and would meet the elusive objective. Alas, this plan required a detour of the Crenshaw-LAX line that would cost more money than in current budget. The MTA Board then proposed and approved a new Crenshaw-LAX station at 96th and Aviation from which LAWA could build a people mover into the Central Terminal Area.

But will this work out? Timing to connect the two projects is questionable. LAWA says an automated people mover (APM) takes seven to nine years from conceptual planning to operation. The MTA station is scheduled for completion in 2022 when the line goes

operational. To meet that schedule LAWA needs to start now. LAWA is nowhere near planning the APM which would have to support an unapproved Consolidated Rental Car facility or the incomplete plans for the Central Terminal Area.

It looks like Nan was right.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE is a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations, committed to exploring and fostering the implementation of programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters. We meet monthly to address key policy issues and hear reports from our standing committee chairs. For additional information about Valley VOTE, for an upcoming meeting agenda, or for previous meeting reports and press releases, we encourage you to go to the Valley VOTE website: www.ValleyVote.org