

Councilmember Don Rocha
City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113
sent via email March 13, 2017

re: Neighborhoods Commission, Rules Committee 3/15/17

Dear Councilmember Rocha,

Writing on my own behalf, I have greatly appreciated the support you and your Staff have given the Neighborhoods Commission over the years, both on the Council and as Council Liaison. However, I respectfully must disagree with some of the recommendations and suggestions in your March 9th memo to the Rules Committee.

As a member of the Commission from its inception through 2016 and having served the last two years as Chair, I feel that the current configuration of the Commission is well-suited for its purpose of representing the interests of the community. The Commission spent a number of months towards the end of its "Pilot Period" in 2013 reviewing and refining the size and structure of the Commission, resulting in recommendations to Council. After taking public comment, the Council considered the recommendations and then adopted the current policy.

There presently are twenty Commissioners on the Commission, two from each Council District; during the Pilot Program there were thirty. While the Commissioners each represent his or her entire district rather than their individual neighborhoods, nonetheless some of the districts are quite diverse and it may be desirable for Commissioners to be more familiar with the different regions of the district – for example, Berryessa is distinct from Alviso even though both are in District 4. (The Commissioner selection process does not require that the Commissioners come from different neighborhoods, but the community delegates at the district's Caucus are free to so choose if they find it desirable.) When I served as Commission Chair, I personally had no difficulty in managing the Commission with twenty members – and I observe that the current Chair is even more adept at time- and Commission-management. While the Neighborhoods Commission is larger than most other City Commissions (for example, the Historic Landmarks Commission has only five), it is still small compared to some other City organizations – the City's Envision 2040 Update Taskforce had nearly forty!

Regarding the selection of the Commissioners: the Community Caucus process is central to the Commission's purpose and to its uniqueness. The Commissioners are selected by the community rather than the Mayor or Councilmembers, and they reflect the concerns of the community rather than those of the Mayor or Council: the Commission would lose its reason to exist if it were to become just a mirror of the Council.

Regarding Staff time for the Caucus: According to current policy (see http://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=2131&meta_id=566172), the Caucuses are to be run by a "neutral Facilitator" (e.g., from an outside agency such as United

Neighborhoods of Santa Clara County or the League of Women Voters) and assisted by Commissioners from districts not up for election that year. "Commission Staff has no official duties at the caucus meeting." The Caucuses have been held at non-governmental sites such as libraries or community centers. The staff time invested in the last round of Caucuses was at the personal wish of the Staff member who wanted to maintain his "hands-on" touch with the process.

The Commission does need some Staff support, and I feel that it has been improving lately. Staff is needed for distribution of meeting notices and materials, posting of the minutes, and archiving of Commission letters and reports. Staff is also needed to shepherd the Commission's letters and reports through the review process and to assure that they are distributed to the Mayor and Council in a timely manner.

One change I would recommend: the meeting time. This year the Commission meeting was shifted forward to a restrictive 6 to 8 PM period "to be consistent with City policy", even as other Commissions have been able to keep their traditional meeting times. The 6 PM meeting starting time places an undue burden on Commissioners and the Public alike coming from work, and the 8 PM closing time needlessly limits the time available for the Commission to complete its work.

In summary: the support of Council and Staff is much appreciated, but please do not change the Neighborhoods Commission's size or Commissioner selection process from that which the Pilot Program Commission helped develop and which is now working well.

Thank you,

~Larry Ames

Dr. Lawrence Ames, past Chair, San Jose Neighborhoods Commission.

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cc: Mayor, Councilmembers, and City Manager's Office
Neighborhoods Commission Chair and Vice Chair
District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG)