

The Honorable Sam Liccardo, Mayor of San José  
Members of the Council, City of San José  
200 East Santa Clara Street  
San José, CA 95113  
via email, sent Aug. 16, 2017

re: Aug. 22nd Agenda, item 5.1: Actions Related to the Structure of the Neighborhoods Commission

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers,

I am writing in strong opposition to “Recommendation #3” in the staff memo dated 8/11/17 ([http://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=&event\\_id=2698&meta\\_id=649107](http://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=2698&meta_id=649107)), “Reduce the Number of Commission Members to 11.”

Note: even though I was a member of the Commission from its inception through 2016 and I served as Chair the last two years, I am writing this email as an individual.

As I said when this topic was brought before the Rules Committee last March, “I feel that the current configuration of the Commission is well-suited for its purpose of representing the interests of the community.” I pointed out that the Commission had spent months towards the end of its “Pilot Period” in 2013 reviewing and refining the size and structure of the Commission, resulting in its present configuration, as approved by Council.

The Staff memo discusses the cost of the Commission. But what are the cost savings by eliminating Commissioners? The cost for Commission meetings is the same: the same room rental and same number of hours of staff time. The agendas are sent via email, and cc'ing to 20 is the same cost as cc'ing to 11. The Commissioners would still be selected by a caucus process, and selecting the top-two does not take longer than selecting the top-one. Also, per the adopted policy, 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, so there should be no cost for Staff time. About the only added cost of a larger Commission is for the parking in the garage, and if that's the limiting factor, I'm sure some of the Commissioners would be willing to chip in or take public transportation. In fact, I suspect that the time consumed in developing and implementing the special process needed to select the 11th member of the Commission would likely be more than any cost savings from a smaller Commission. And if the issue is that one individual is writing too many emails to Staff, there's no guarantee that reducing the size of the Commission would result in the departure of that Commissioner.

There are advantages to a 20-member Commission. As I said last March, “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.” There is no requirement that the Commissioners come from different neighborhoods: it is for the community delegates to choose who they think will best represent the interests of their district.

When I served as Commission Chair, I had no difficulty in managing the Commission with twenty members, and I've seen that the current Chair is even more adept at time- and Commission-management than I was. While the Neighborhoods Commission is larger than most other City

Commissions (for example, the Planning Commission has only seven), it is still small compared to some other City organizations – the City’s Envision 2040 Update Taskforce had nearly forty!

I reiterate my one recommended change: 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 though 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 who commute from work, and the 8 PM closing time needlessly limits the time available for the Commission to complete its work.

In summary: do not change the Neighborhoods Commission’s size or Commissioner selection process from that which is now working well.

Thank you,

~Larry Ames

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

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cc: City Manager’s Office  
Neighborhoods Commission Chair and Vice Chair  
District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG)