

USC NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION PROJECT

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Presenter: Dr. Juliet Musso, University of Southern California (USC)
City Representatives: Darren Martinez, City Attorney's Office
Greig Smith, Council Member Bernson's Office
Erik Sanjuro, Council Member Tom LaBonge's Office

Neighborhood Council Representatives Present:

Paul Waters, Studio City Neighborhood Council

Russell Rock, Lincoln Heights Neighborhood Council

Steve Zimmerman, (Unknown)

Stevie Stern, United Neighborhoods of the Historic Arlington Heights, West Adams, and Jefferson Park Communities

Jesus Martinez, (Unknown)

Sheila Bernard, Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council

Diann Corral, (Unknown)

Edwin Ramirez, Vernon/Main Neighborhood Council

Peer Ghent, Valley Glen Community Council

Joel Bloom, Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council

Summary: USC's Dr. Juliet Musso has extensively studied other governmental structures in cities across America that are similar to the Neighborhood Councils in the City of Los Angeles. She explains the differences and similarities of those structures to the Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles and by doing so; she gives Neighborhood Councils many ideas.

Juliet: We're going to be conducting a survey of Certified Neighborhood Council Board Members. It's an electronic survey with a phone follow-up, and what we're trying to understand are some important questions about political networking across the City of Los Angeles. What we hope to be able to do is to show how Neighborhood Councils change the patterns of political networking over time. We're going to be doing a couple of surveys to understand who these sort of new Neighborhood Councils are talking to, both within Neighborhood Councils, across Neighborhood Councils, and with the City. Once we have that we can then to see how that changes over time.

The expectations for Neighborhood Councils is that they will build really strong networks as political sort of infrastructures within neighborhoods and across neighborhoods, so everyone can participate in coalition building. That's just sort of a broad overview of what we've been doing. Our website is on the handout that I've given you. We have a variety of information and post many resources.

Most of the field work for the study was done by Terry Cooper and one of our doctoral students Evan Lincove. They produced a report on what's been happening in

five cities that they visited. We do have their findings in draft form, which we're going to be polishing soon and hopefully have it available in a couple of months. Those of you that are interested in getting more information about this, we should have something that's ready to go real soon. The cities that we visited that have something similar to Neighborhood Councils or that we could comparatively study were New York, Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Columbus, and Seattle. When we heard about the Neighborhood Council system in Los Angeles, we said to ourselves "let's see if we can find something out about those practices in other cities, how they design their Neighborhood Councils, what role they play in the government structure, what kind of funding they get, how big they are, and what kinds of internal structures they have. To our surprise, no one has written much about this.

One area that we were interested in was the funding section of all these Neighborhood Council systems. As you know, Los Angeles has sort of been developing its policy regarding resources to Neighborhood Councils over time. We had questions like, how are they actually giving the money out? Do they do it based on population? Do they give equal amounts to everyone? Do they do it on a project basis? Is it just operating funds? So what other kinds of resources are they providing to support neighborhood councils? So a lot of our interests were driven by these questions about resources.

We tried to pick large cities because we thought they would be more comparable to Los Angeles and what we're seeing is that systems vary a lot in particular ways, and that there's not one single model for the way neighborhood governments or Neighborhood Councils work in other cities. There seems, however, to be some kind of general types of trends. The first question that we were really interested in is what powers and activities are there. As you will recall, the City of Los Angeles has had a lot of kind of discussions and debates about whether Neighborhood Councils are City entities. They've decided that you are city agencies for the purposes of the Brown Act and liability issues, but I guess they're going to allow Neighborhood Councils to incorporate and get funds, nonprofits, or at least to create affiliated nonprofits to get funding. There are a lot of questions to what extent the Neighborhood Council system really is an arm of the City versus independent agencies, and what difference does that make.

What we found is that there is a lot of variation and what's interesting is that there's a spectrum where you have these very institutionalized community boards. New York, for example, as you probably know, has five boroughs. Their community boards are underneath the boroughs, and there are fifty-nine of them, across five burrows, and they represent a population of roughly 100,000. They're really part of the political machinery of New York, not to say political machine, but the political machinery of New York. They are official city entities. Community board members are appointed by borough presidents, and they are not self-selected or elected. They are appointed by the New York City politicians. You can just imagine what that implies in terms of their independence. They essentially have a district administrator of sorts, a district manager who answers to them, and they really are almost like official city commissions. If you think about the commissions here in Los Angeles that are appointed by the Mayor of Los Angeles, they function very much in that way. They have a formal mandated role with regard to land use oversights, and they also have a fair amount of funding,

\$175,000 to their offices, but they don't act very independently at all. There are certain kinds of activities that they don't really engage in. They also have offices, which are funded. They get involved to some extent in coordinating city services and to some extent in land use oversight. They do very little in the way of neighborhood beautification, advocacy, political advocacy, or neighborhood improvement kinds.

Furthermore, let me discuss the other end of the spectrum, which involves Minneapolis and St. Paul. They're somewhat different, but they have some things that are in common. I guess this might just be my view, but I think that maybe Minneapolis and Saint Paul are better models for the City of Los Angeles. If you were thinking about where you would want to go with Neighborhood Councils, both in Minneapolis and St. Paul, are represent quasi-city governments, however they're "Neighborhood Councils" are incorporated as nonprofits. Incorporated as nonprofits means that both of them get some funds from the city government, so Saint Paul for example gets \$30,000 to \$50,000 from City government, but they also qualify as nonprofits, which entitles them to other benefits and sources of income.

What's incredible is that in Minneapolis they get huge amounts. The community councils were really started as part of a neighborhood revitalization project, so they were started not out of a sense of frustration with the city, but as a way of undertaking community new development in Minneapolis. In St. Paul, it was much more like Los Angeles where they were started because people were feeling frustrated with the city government, and it was a way of trying to incorporate people more politically and connect the neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Both of these cities have independent quasi-city entities. Both of them get funding from the cities. St. Paul gets \$30,000 to \$50,000. It is not project oriented, and it is based on a formula based on population.

Female Speaker: Is there any problem with sort of competition between the city and the community councils applying for similar federal monies?

Juliet: We didn't hear anything about that being an issue, but we also didn't ask that question specifically. We didn't ask that question specifically. I think they coordinate their activities a lot. In Minneapolis, for example, they submit community development plans, essentially neighborhood development plans that are approved by the city. So they're very project oriented. There are 61 organizations for 81 neighborhoods, and so they're actually undertaking specific projects that have been approved by the city, which probably gets rid of some of this competition. The city gives them a lot of money. The city has given some of them up to \$2,000,000 a year. The average amount that the city has given is tax increment money. Do you know what tax increment money is? Some of you who are involved in redevelopment and may know what it is. It's when you have satisfied an area for redevelopment and then the property value that increases has property tax associated with it, and that money is earmarked for particular purposes, and it's called tax increment. What Minneapolis has done is they've earmarked a specific revenue source, not even funding, a specific revenue source for these organizations, and they distribute an average of \$300,000 a year for their approved plans.

Female Speaker: Isn't that what our Community Redevelopment Association (CRA) is doing now?

Juliet: It's very similar. It's like a quasi-CRA function.

Female Speaker: That's a model, would be to say that we're going to take the money either way from the CRA instead of going through the Neighborhood Council?

Juliet: That's eventually one option for Los Angeles, and I'm not endorsing any particular option at this point, but one option for L.A. is to move towards a gradual incorporation so that you merge the Neighborhood Councils and the CRAs so that Neighborhood Councils start assuming the CRA function and that you have access to any tax increment funding to be able to undertake projects.

The other thing about both St. Paul and Minneapolis, which I think is a really important lesson for Los Angeles is that they have stable funding. They leverage, so that both in Minneapolis and St. Paul, can apply for additional funding and the \$30,000 to \$50,000 in St. Paul, which is roughly similar to what the city is saying they're going to give all of you, that's about one quarter to one-third of their budget, is actually getting over \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. They also have the staff and the office space to undertake these activities. I should also note that both in Columbus and Seattle, the other cities that we looked at, are not allowed by the city to apply for additional funds. In Seattle, Neighborhood Councils have to go to the city and compete for grants. The grants are very small, like \$10,000. They can, however, apply for larger grants, but it's very little money, and they are not allowed to incorporate nonprofits or to apply for other funds.

In Columbus, these area commissions get the grand sum of \$3,000 each, and so Columbus is probably not a good model for Los Angeles. They are not allowed to incorporate as a nonprofit, and they can't leverage this fund. They're not allowed to apply for other funding. Because of that there's this real range in funding amounts. We're thinking that this resource issue is the one that all of you are interested in influencing city policy need to continue thinking about because probably over the long run, you may not want to be dependent on the city for the \$50,000 grant every year. Also, Neighborhood Councils becoming institutionalized to the point where you have some sort of stable sum set, you know, set of funds, like this tax increment money or some other kind of funding or to achieve independence as nonprofit so that you can apply for other funding. It's so important for Neighborhood Council effectiveness to have operating funds. That is probably one of the two or three lessons that we took away from this experience. The Neighborhood Councils that have stable funding and that can leverage it are the ones that are getting a lot done. In Columbus they feel neglected, disenfranchised, and like they can't do anything. I think that's probably one of the most important lessons.

Female Speaker: You shouldn't push tax increment because maybe you guys do get a tax increment, and you have to be blighted to start. Happily, most of our neighborhoods are not.

Juliet: That's true. I'm not actually pushing a tax increment. I'm just using it as an example of one possible source of funding that some areas could possibly access, but I agree.

Paul: The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, I think it was this last Wednesday, just passed a change in policy about the money coming down. Apparently the way that money was intended to come was it was going to be project oriented versus operations oriented, and what I believe they adopted, I don't know, did they adopt it? Does anybody know whether they adopted it?

Juliet: They're moving in that direction.

Paul: They're going to say no, you can use it, but their thing was you can use a hundred percent of that for operations, and I'm presuming operations is staff, and office space. It sounds like you think that's a very good move.

Juliet: Let's actually take a minute before we move on and I think who I've met before from Windsor Square has something else to say about this too, but this is just my view, and I'm also really interested in hearing what you all think about this. It's really important to give Neighborhood Councils discretion over their funding number one. Secondly, I think that, we'll hold them accountable to show that they're using it wisely, but I also think that it's important for you all to be able to leverage it. Thirdly, you're all still in an organizational development stage, and you may need the money to do outreach, organize, and to get yourselves off the ground. You may not be at the point where you're really able to do projects at this point. So that's sort of my view. Norman had a point that he wanted to make and then we'll get things going.

Norman: You have to make a clear-cut distinction between project funds and organizational management funds. You're talking about a hundred thousand dollars or a million. You're talking about project funds. \$3,000 to \$10,000 to help you pay the phone bills and all that sounds fine.

Juliet: In Seattle the \$10,000 are project funds and these organizations don't get relief. They get a small amount of organizational funds that they can apply for, but predominantly project funds in Seattle, and actually the \$30,000 to \$50,000 in St. Paul is not targeted, but you're completely correct that the money in Minneapolis, the large money, is project oriented. This money also allows people to hire operational staff. In other words, you can build some administrative support into your project, so they have staff.

Russell: What I would advocate is that the 501C3 designation because --

Juliet: RC4.

Russell: RC4, so that you can apply for federal money, state monies, and you can have grants writing within your council organization and you can get funded. Then it doesn't

depend whether you're a blighted area, or a well to do area. As long as you can identify projects and develop a good narrative that will help your community. You know the California Foundation and several other entities out there are available for you to tap into, that's what I advocate.

Steve: Could you talk a little bit about the relationships you saw between the neighborhood Councils in different cities that you visited and the existing 501C3's in those areas. What did you find?

Juliet: Did they compete with the existing 501C3's or did they partner with them?

Steve: Or did they collaborate?

Juliet: We didn't look at that question specifically, and that's a really good follow-up question. We were looking much more closely at their relationship within the city, and these were two to three day site visits, and we did actually talk to a lot of 501C3's. We were talking mostly to city people and neighborhood organizations, so I don't have an answer to that question, but I think it's an excellent one. What do you think should happen?

Steve: We are getting in a lot of areas 501C3 already plays the advocacy role in state government; and then I think it's going to be interesting in some areas of our city how the Neighborhood Council is going to interface with that, particularly with the agencies.

Juliet: One of the things that people talked a lot about in Los Angeles is the role of Neighborhood Councils being neighborhood lobbyist, so that we have downtown political interests at City Hall. If you think about who the really powerful groups are downtown, organized labor, business, developers, and some other kinds of city wide groups that are mobilized. We didn't see this idea in these cities with a strong political advocacy role. St. Paul, for example, started out being very much a kind of lobbyist system, but I think a lot of people contemplate that for Los Angeles, and they kind of become incorporated informally into the administrative process, so instead of going and lobbying the city council for example, what happens is that the planning department starts to convince developers to take stuff to coordinate our new councils there in advance so that they work things out informally. What we've seen in a lot of these cities is the development of a lot of informal relationships with the city council, with departments, and with other members of the larger community, like nonprofits. Things are kind of negotiated in advance, and it's not like Neighborhood Councils are sort of competing for attention at City Hall when things get to the City Council. They're really more advising on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, I actually think that's how Neighborhood Councils could be effective in Los Angeles. By developing an ongoing relationship with the departments, so that you have your Neighborhood Councils have personal relationships with city officials, and they call you on the telephone or e-mail you to find out what you think about things in advance. Overall, we're seeing the sort of idea of protest politics channeled through Neighborhood Councils and not in these cities. They're much more sort of incorporated within the political workings of the city.

Stevie: My question is about the funding. You were talking about increment money, this gentleman talked about 501C's -- 501C3's or C4's. In terms of getting creative, are there any other ideas you have in terms of experiences that you have from other cities or recommendations that your project is going to come up with to get creative in terms of steady funding?

Juliet: The promise of steady funding, which is also true in a research environment. It's hard when you try and finance yourself on grant money because you're constantly "grant writing." I think one way that Neighborhood Councils and some other cities that we've looked at have managed to bring in resources is not necessarily through funding, but by partnering with businesses and others in their community to try and get any kind of support. I hear a lot of people talking about what can we do to get funding? That's super important. The neighborhood councils can get stable funding and leverage it to undertake projects. People are not spending enough time and thinking about the people power question. As important as getting stable funding is, getting a stable volunteer base is also as important. Participation is key to getting anything done. I don't think we've paid enough attention to this issue.

Female Speaker: I was at the Citywide Alliance of Neighborhood Councils and we asked Greg Nelson specifically about bylaws because I heard a rumor that they were not certifying councils who were applying the 501C3's, and he clarified that becoming a 501C3 was strictly a policy issue, an internal issue and that the city was not addressing. That was one, and the other, the \$50,000 allowance that we're getting, he clarified was strictly discretionary.

Juliet: Right. I think that's where the City Council's moving.

Darren: I want to explain this issue of the 501C3 Corporation and how it corresponds with Neighborhood Councils. The city is not going to certify a 501C3 corporation. It's really a separate entity. It's not discouraging you from doing so. I mean it's a good idea to do so if you've heard a recommendation to do so, but we're not going to be involved with those activities or those projects. They're going to be separate from the city.

Female Speaker: You're saying that if an organization is already a 501C3 and it comes to be certified, that the city will not be able to certify it?

Darren: We're certifying a different entity. We're certifying a Neighborhood Council.

Juliet: They have to have a separate 501C3 organization?

Darren: It's independent and separate, and it should be treated that way for purposes of the Neighborhood Council.

Male Speaker: Mr. Martinez, could you quickly explain what a 501C3 is?

Darren: It is a nonprofit corporation that's set up for state and federal governments, which basically allows some tax exempt benefits to the companies and to companies that engage in --

Juliet: Actually, Mr. Martinez would you mind clarifying the lobbying restrictions on 501C3's and 501C4's? I thought 501C3's were not allowed to lobby politically.

Darren: I don't know what the 501C3's political limitations are.

Female Speaker: They can only devote a small percentage of their resources to lobbying.

Juliet: My understanding is that 501C4's can be political, but my understanding is that donations to 501C4's are not tax exempt. 501C3's donations are tax deductible. That's a big advantage for getting people to donate things to you, but you can only devote a certain amount of activities to lobbying.

Female Speaker: There's a very important point. It's any time we contribute the money to the city, that's deductible under your Schedule A. We'll look at your information and you'll find that.

Juliet: I think the city is still working out their policy about how they are going to handle those kinds of donations, so I think you should wait to see what they do.

Female Speaker: I'm not sure if you said about certification. IRS gives the designation on 501C3, if a council is already in the process of applying for a 501C3 or has a 501C3, am I understanding you to say that the city attorney will not approve a certification as a council?

Darren: No.

Erik: The intention of using nonprofits has always been part of the vision of every council. It's just a tool. It's an arm of political action, a lot of the people's lobbyist, which the Neighborhood Councils are credited to become, that is what the council's are for. They make political decisions. The beauty of Neighborhood Councils is they are not limited in talking about city policies. They can talk to their assembly, their senate, and school board. They can do a variety of political actions.

Earlier, you made some comment that we may want to be more independent. Neighborhood Councils are part of the city family, so they have access to it and part of that we can delegate public hearings. There are a lot of things they can do with being part of the family, but at the same time they do have a great deal more independence than they would if they were just part of the regular city departments.

Juliet: The quasi sort of city agency.

Erik: They are in between. It's almost like a university, being a student organization where you receive some funding from the school, but you have to follow some policies as far as getting the money, but you have a lot of leeway. The university's not going to tell you "say this, say that." You can kind of do events and do what you want to do. It's the same kind of idea that you're an organization that's sponsored by the city, but you're free to go out, and if you want to set up a nonprofit, you can do that. You have to keep those actions somewhat separate. That's another tool to bring you fund raising. The other nice thing about being part of the city is not only do you get the \$50,000 a year, but they're also going to have discussions of other types of grants you can apply for. There are a lot of advantages in being part of the city.

Jesus: I believe there's a restriction on Neighborhood Councils participating in political races.

Juliet: They can't endorse political candidates.

Juliet: It's hard for Neighborhood Councils to do it all, and so we saw that Neighborhood Councils who were much more involved in kind of being advisory entities and incorporated into the government structure, such as in New York, and coordinating city services, they can do a lot of work in the area of neighborhood improvement. Conversely, in St. Paul and Minneapolis we saw a lot more involvement in project-oriented work, and these were not just in blighted areas. These are across the city. They were not as involved in city policy making, and interestingly, none of these five cities had very much involvement in the city budget process, and so it seems like if you think about the areas where Neighborhood Councils can be involved in city wide budgeting and kind of policy makes, in neighborhood beautification projects, in decision-making, and advising on land use and other kinds of policies, in coordinating city services, and then doing kind of more community building things.

None of the Neighborhood Councils that we saw did it all. This is a suggestion that as you're starting out, you shouldn't try to do it all because you may be biting off more than you can chew. If you want to be very politically oriented, you can be politically oriented. If you want to really focus on neighborhood improvement, you can focus on neighborhood improvement. If you want to advise on budgeting, you can advise on budgeting. If you want to get into land use, you can really get into that, but my suggestion is that especially as you start out. What we're seeing in these cities is that people tend to focus in one area and it tends to be more city wide because these are much more the typical cookie-cutter city. The weird and wonderful thing about Los Angeles is that it's left to all of you to decide where you want to focus your energies, and I think if you try and focus on everything, you may find yourselves over extended.

Sheila Bernard: If you get a lot of money, but you don't know what you're going to do with it, you're not going to do much, but if you get a little money and you know exactly what you're going to do with it, you're going to do more. We had a visioning process and Dr. Musso made a very strong suggestion, that we conduct a strategic visioning process for all of Venice. I'm very interested, personally, and I'm not speaking for the Neighborhood Council now, but I'm very much interested in seeing Venice go through a

strategic planning process, which decides land use, which refines, and figures out a specific plan, which develops our transit corridor along transit oriented and development lines.

If we don't keep volunteer time very strong but institutionalized in our Neighborhood Councils, they're going to be entrenched with little machines just like city government can be. It's volunteer time that makes the world go round. We have to recognize that, and not let any funding that we do destroy that.

Juliet: That's a good point and what focus does your Neighborhood Council want to have?

Diann: Can you explain how you brought dealing with your local land issues?

Sheila: We worked with our council office and we deal with the planning deputy who gives us a call anytime new development comes into our area. We've set-up a committee of two to three people that will meet with him in his office and go over the plans with the developers and deal with issues, like we have Mattel coming in and we're concerned about one side was residential and all the windows looking into the residential area, and so we worked that out with them at the planning stage. That worked out real nice. The way that we figured a work process is that we created two and three people committee and then we had a meeting where we saw if that project was scheduled and found out who was involved.

Juliet: Developing those relationships is key and I think it has to happen in both directions. I've noticed that because we have talked to a lot of city people and a lot of neighborhood people, and I hear kind of from the neighborhood people a lot of frustration because the city's so removed and bureaucratic. You all feel unresponsive and then I kind of hear from a lot of the city people that the Neighborhood Councils have to get out there.

Female Speaker: The other thing that he would bring up was concerns for our area. It is very difficult to get a strategic plan and nearly impossible right now just because the resources within the planning department. People have suggested that we do something like a neighboring area of ours, Valley Glen. They had a few conditions imposed on certain areas. We have a committee set up that's going to investigate what areas will be light conditions, but what type of conditions would we like enforced, and then we'll sit back once we have that together, go back with our planning deputy for our area and say, "Okay. This is what we want," and they'll push it through planning for us to get those hearings done.

Juliet: That's how you can be effective.

Edwin: What we did is we identified the resources we currently had in Pacoima. We have a group that has a grant for environmental improvement, so we don't need to write a grant. We already have it, so all we need to do is collaborate with them. I hear everybody talking becoming nonprofit and getting more money from the city for

operation, everything is needed, but I think that it's best if you assess the need and address the need from within the neighborhood.

Juliet: This is reinforcing Sheila's point about strategic planning.

Edwin: Right, but we have grants even the organization within our area that are already operating. What we did, instead of pursuing getting the money from the city or writing grants, is that we just collaborated with them and it made the process easy. We see two things with the Neighborhood Council where eliminating the waiting process because it is neighborhood that is bringing forward their request. They've got to accelerate the process for getting things done. Then when being as specific with the needs you are also participating indirectly with the planning.

Juliet: You have a lot of resources in your community.

Peer: We've got a few problems in the Valley. We've got secession competing with this process and all that makes you kind of a mixed bag as to where their vision is. Secondly, I've heard people over the time say, "Well, you know, you're only advisory, and it's going to be weak and it's going to be that." We're bringing \$24,000,000 into the Valley Glen area through the county, through Santa Monica conservancies, with the MTA Busway, and through direct contributions from the council office. The importance of establishing an open door to the city council person, and I've been through three city council people in our area, and I can tell you firsthand that without the support of the council office, you might as well just go on vacation, and I've seen it both ways.

Juliet: Let me just reinforce one thing there. All of the Neighborhood Councils that we visited and the ones that have been written about are all advisory. I mean, they have some formal role in particular processes and in a few cases they have very specific small-delegated powers, but there's not this kind of notion of having legal authority to veto land developments or things like that. That doesn't happen in any city that I know at least with Neighborhood Councils. The second thing is, do not confuse the legal authority with political power. In fact, it's better not to have legal authority delegated to you because that constrains your reach. It's better to have the kind of quasi independence that you have being approved but also, you know, certified so that you have legitimacy, but also being quasi independent so that you can really work in a lot of different ways. The story that we also refer back to is that Wendy Gruel won by 212 votes, right?

Speaker: It was only around 100.

Juliet: Think about term limits. We're going to have mechanisms that destroy the incumbency advantage. What does that mean for your ability to be able to influence future city council members? People are going to know that they're going to come to you because you're going to be organizational infrastructure that can help get them votes, and then they are going to be accountable to you once elected. Plus

Neighborhood Councils are going to become, I believe, training grounds for future city council members. I think that Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles can be extremely influential.

Debbie: What we find is that it's more difficult getting the departments to take us seriously, and I don't know if anyone has anything that they can share, but there's that mentality that because of term limits, why we need to listen to the council person because they're going to be out, but we're the city employees, and we're here to stay. How can we impact that?

Joel: I understand that there's an executive order for all general managers to meet with everybody on a quarterly basis. I don't know if that's mandatory or not. I don't know if they're going to come to every council. There's going to be something like this for that to happen, I'm assuming, and I'm wondering what's the message? I saw a lot of money and people from City Hall today. Three council districts represent us, and not one person from either one of them is here today, and that scares me because they work for the city.

Juliet: What I think happened in a lot of cities, and I guess this may take awhile to happen in Los Angeles is that the departments have learned that their jobs are actually made easier if they work with Neighborhood Councils. Here in Los Angeles I see Public Works and the Planning Dept. already moving in that direction. I stress that you are in constant contact with folks from those departments. You need to tell them what things you want them to spend their money on.

Russell: That path that you're telling us to follow comes with a lot of difficulties. The Planning Department has an over arch in the ambition to tell you what to do, and I have to say that our experience with the linkages to the gold mine has been dealing with some nice people who come to you in the 19th hour and say, "By the middle of next week we need to you have pick out street lights, trees, and as far as the design goes, it's already set."

Juliet: It's symbolic politics.

Russell: I've been dealing a lot with the MTA on our portion of the gold mine. The problem is they set up a different commissioner to build the line going to Pasadena. We've gotten a lot of input from Boyle Heights and East L.A.

Erik: I think to some degree we're reaching a point of critical mass. Recently, Neighborhood Councils have been so conceptual, and unfortunately there's been a lot of the press about Neighborhood Councils, which has been negative. Certainly in our district we've had a very nasty fight over the certification of one Neighborhood Council. As a result of that I am sensing that the general managers have been hesitant to bring Neighborhood Councils too closely into their work, especially in the cases where there's rivalry, so how do you broker freedom with one group and then talk to the other?

What they've been waiting to see is that a large portion of the city is organized, and now that seems to be happening. They're done and are doing a good job in the last year with the past applications that have been certified quickly. Now that we're seeing a lot of neighborhoods organized, you're going to see more of the departments sit down and say, "Oh, okay, well, let's talk. Let's figure this out." Council offices have been told by the City Attorney to stay out of it until the Neighborhood Council is certified.

Juliet: One thing that we did see in these cities is that the most activity was primarily on these kinds of localized issues. In all of the cities that we've seen and also in cities that have been studied by other scholars, it seems the way that Neighborhood Councils really can be effective is in focusing on issues within their neighborhood and within their community. They have -- for good or bad, I'm not saying that you shouldn't. I actually think there's a role for across city coalition building, and I hope it happens, but we don't see a lot of evidence in other city. It's that neighborhood councils coalesced to address citywide issues. For whatever reason, I think it's hard to do, and so it hasn't happened as much. Maybe it can happen in Los Angeles, but it would have to happen through sort of an organizational structure like either a Congress of Neighborhoods that's more oriented towards deliberation than kind of service delivery, which this one is, or in kind of the Alliance of Neighborhood Councils. I think the Alliance of Neighborhood Councils that's developed as a self-organized structure here could become a way for everyone to kind of collaborate on more citywide issues rather than these kinds of local issues.

Greig: Neighborhood Councils provide two things. One in breaking down an arrogant bureaucratic process in the Planning Department in particular is that they haven't had a natural relationship with communities, and that's why these things get overlooked, and this process is going to help create that face-to-face relationship that we've never had. So you'll have a say in most of the planning of the future. I have a staff of 10 people who represent 250,000 people in our council district. If anyone has something to complain about, it's got to come to us to get it fixed. What Neighborhood Councils are doing is providing us with thousands of more eyes out there to find those problems that my staff of 10 people can't find. They're making thousands of eyes to City Hall.

Juliet: In all the cities that we visited, we saw the consistent perception that Neighborhood Councils in those cities were not sufficiently representative of the neighborhoods, and in at least one city, it was causing the city officials to bypass Neighborhood Councils because they were not perceived to be legitimate representation of the neighborhood. You have to make sure that you're Neighborhood Councils are representative, not just because it's the spirit of neighborhood participation, but because it's absolutely crucial for you to be viewed as legitimate. If you're not viewed as legitimate, you will not be taken seriously by the city.