

PORTER RANCH
NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

General Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

Shepherd of the Hills Church

19700 Rinaldi St., Porter Ranch, CA 91326

1. Welcome and Introductions

President Mel Mitchell called the Meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and explained procedures.

2. Roll Call

Board Members introduced themselves: Mel Mitchell (President), Paula Cracium (Vice-President), Bright Aregs, Mandhata Chauhan, Sue Hammarlund, Ron Nagai, and Vas Singh. Becky Leveque arrived later.

Seven of the 11 Board Members were present at the beginning of the Meeting, which is a quorum, so the Board could make Motions and take votes. Absent: Christopher Cooper (Treasurer), and Ali Dabirian (Secretary). Also attending were approximately 65 Stakeholders and Guests.

3. President, Mel Mitchell - Motion to approve proposed agenda.

MOTION (by Mr. Mitchell, seconded by Ms. Cracium): to approve the Agenda for this November 10, 2009 General Board Meeting as written.

MOTION PASSED without any objections

4. Secretary, Ali Dabirian - Motion to approve unapproved Minutes.

The following correction to the October 6, 2009 General Board Meeting Minutes was requested:

Page four, third line from the end: “. . . Mr. Cohen, then, later, Mr. Singh, left the Meeting” should read “. . . Mr. Cohen left the Meeting.” Mr. Singh did not leave.

MOTION (by Mr. Dabirian, seconded by Mr. Singh): to approve the Minutes of the October 6, 2009 General Board Meeting as corrected.

MOTION to APPROVE THE MINUTES as corrected **PASSED** without any objections; Mr. Chauhan abstained.

5. Treasurer, Christopher Cooper - Motion to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented at the November 10, 2009 meeting.

Mr. Mitchell said that Mr. Cooper was unable to attend. Mr. Nagai suggested and it was agreed to **TABLE** this Item to the next General Board Meeting.

There was extensive discussion about procedures to be followed regarding expenditures approval and funding. Melvin Canas, Project Coordinator, L.A. Dept. of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE) (818-374-9953; Melvin.Canas@lacity.org; www.EmpowerLA.org), clarified that budgeted line items don't need to be approved again, but that the Neighborhood Council [NC] "needs to be careful . . . The line item process . . . needs to be very specific . . . [Expenditures] can be for an event, otherwise it's a category."

[The following announcements of Ms. Park and Mr. Canas were made after Item #10.] Seme Park, Field Deputy for L.A. City District 12 Councilman Greig Smith (818-756-8501; seme.park@lacity.org), announced that the Metrolink Holiday Express will be at the Chatsworth Station from 6:00 – 6:45 p.m. and the Northridge Station from 7:00 – 7:45 p.m. on November 22nd. Also, Councilman Smith is pleased with the City Attorney's language in the new medical marijuana ordinance, Council File 08-0923. The Councilman introduced a Motion to establish a DWP Inspector General who'd "report directly to the public."

Mr. Canas encouraged Board Members who haven't already to take the DONE Ethics Training online (<http://ethics.lacity.org/education/ethics2007/?audience=done>) or at the next NC Valley Regional Training December 5th, 8:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Braude Governmental Center, 6262 Van Nuys Blvd., Van Nuys. A Deputy City Attorney will do the Ethics Training and BONC [the L.A. Board of Neighborhood Commissioners] will discuss NC Bylaws standardization. The Mayor's Office will present regarding the 2010 Census. "Trainings are open to the public." Let Mr. Canas or DONE (213-485-1360) know if you'll attend. He added that NC elections outreach is "up to the NCs." DONE will be conducting Citywide "community dialogues . . . to talk about civic engagement," including November 20th at Lawrence Middle School [10100 Variel Avenue, Chatsworth] and there'll "be at least one more [in this area] before the election."

6. Discussion, selection of a new PRNC Board member to fill the vacant at-large position (See Bylaws pages 5-6).

Mr. Mitchell announced that Irv Cohen submitted his resignation last month as a PRNC Board Member. Mr. Mitchell explained that the Bylaws require going through a replacement process and the NC "will publish candidate filing requirements on the [PRNC] website [www.prnc.org]." He read from the Bylaws regarding the Board vacancy filling procedure. A Candidate Filing Form needs to be submitted.

7. Tabled Motion - for the PRNC to draft a letter to the L.A. Dept. of Recreation and Parks requesting the construction of a children's swing set area near the present children's play area in Holleigh Bernson Park. The swing set area shall be approximately 20 feet by 20 feet and contain four to six swings.

Ms. Hammarlund volunteered to draft the letter.

8. PRNC Committee Update - PRNC ad hoc committee to evaluate and select a vendor of Website and PR Services.

Mr. Mitchell explained the history and handling of the position, and that Moore Business Results has submitted a proposal.

9. Motion, Mel Mitchell - to approve the proposal from Moore Business Results.

MOTION (by Ms. Cracium, seconded by Ms. Hammarlund): to approve the proposal from Moore Business Results for Website and PR Services through June 30, 2010.

MOTION PASSED without any objections; Mr. Chauhan abstained.

10. PRNC Election 2010 Update

[This Agenda Item was addressed after Item #5.] Christine Flores, Project Coordinator Assistant, Office of the City Clerk, Election Division, Neighborhood Council Election Unit (213-978-0444; <http://cityclerk.lacity.org/election/index.htm>), distributed and reviewed the "2010 [NC] Election Procedures for [PRNC]." The PRNC election will be March 2, 2010 at the World Vision Church [19514 Rinaldi St., Room 101], 2:00 – 8:00 p.m. Ms. Cracium expressed concern that documents submitted to DONE aren't matched in the Procedures and that the entire Board being up for election is a conflict because Board Members can be accused of organizing their own election. Ms. Flores said that vote-by-mail can only be requested by phone. The City Clerk's Office is excluded from assisting with election outreach. Ballots will be taken to and counted at Piper Technical Center [555 Ramirez St., Los Angeles] and visitors are welcomed to observe. Volunteer Poll workers are sought to "work in a region other than your own." She or Stella Yun [Stella.Yun@lacity.org] can be contacted for more information.

There was extensive discussion of Board Members' concerns regarding the lateness [in the year] of the presentation and differences between the Procedures and PRNC documents submitted to DONE.

7:00 p.m. Presentation: "Veterans: How Will Our Sepulveda VA Serve Them?"

New Directions, an organization that provides comprehensive services to Veterans in L.A. County, has proposed to convert seven acres and two empty buildings on the 160-acre Veteran's Administration facility in North Hills into 147 housing units for homeless and disabled veterans.

[This Agenda Item was addressed after Item #9.] Mr. Mitchell introduced the Item. Project supporters distributed a packet of photos and information. Dora Gallo, Chief Executive Officer, A Community of Friends [ACOF; 213-480-0809; www.acof.org], explained that "The VA [U.S. Veterans Administration] approached New Directions [310-914-4045; www.ndvets.org] to consider developing housing on this site . . . The VA amended [the] lease to say 'veterans only' . . . [There's] plenty of space to build a hospital if the VA had any intentions to . . . The VA is not inclined to do so at this point . . ." She claimed that it's "a long-term opportunity for veterans to receive the services they deserve . . . The VA wanted housing, but had no resources to build [it] . . ."

Ben Rosen, Project Manager, ACOF, described that the “project is located within Buildings Four and Five and the seven acres surrounding them, and no other part of the 160 acres of the campus . . . The project will be primarily an interior renovation; the exterior will remain essentially the same . . . [There’ll be] 20,000 square feet of services . . . [They’re] estimating the total cost of the project . . . [at] \$40 million . . . including a number of energy-efficient design features . . .”

[PRNC Board Member Ms. Leveque arrived at this time.]

Toni Reinis, Executive Director, New Directions, explained that the project is “to create housing for men and women who’re returning from the military . . . to be able to support one another and heal together . . .” She claimed that “the buildings have been vacant for years . . . have asbestos . . . [and] need seismic rehabilitations . . .” [It’s] “for single individuals” and group interaction areas will be available. She and Ms. Gallo explained that there’ll be a dining room and staff on site 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There’ll be one residential manager in each building. Physical and mental health disabilities will be accepted; referrals will be welcomed from agencies that work with veterans. They’re not ready to take applications; there’ll be a screening process and everyone will have a lease. Construction would take about 18 months. The City is essentially out of this process.

Peggy Burgess, Member, North Hills West NC Land Use Committee, said she’s representing that NC and “a coalition of over three million opponents,” and that “the U.S. Congress and the taxpayers will make the final decision [about the project, which she said is] opposed by 12 Neighborhood Councils . . . the American Legion . . . the National Disabled Veterans . . . California Veterans of Foreign Wars . . . Veterans are solidly opposed . . . There’s nothing wrong with those buildings . . . [ACOF] and New Directions are not veterans, they’re developers . . . The veterans-only provision [in a recent VA letter] relates to in-patient facilities, not an apartment complex . . . This is about land . . . If this project goes through, the rest of the 160 acres will be open to development . . . The VA threw out [a veterans program] to bring in [ACOF] . . . If the VA wants to provide housing, they can build it anywhere . . . The developers get title . . . This is just another land grab . . . [and] a \$48 million taxpayer rip-off . . .”

Ms. Burgess continued, [veterans] “won’t need apartments, they’ll need more medical services and facilities . . . Since 1996 [the Sepulveda campus] has been systematically downsized . . . [Veterans] are dying because they can’t get to West L.A. and Long Beach for services . . . [There was] no competitive bidding . . . During the 75-year lease . . . the Secretary may initiate transfer of the lease . . .” Ms. Burgess gave examples of land transfers done soon after other “mixed-use leases” started. She claimed there’s “no provision for what happens to the land if the developer can’t make the mortgage payments . . . Veterans are entitled to receive medical care and treatment in their area . . . to force injured and aging veterans to have to travel two to four hours to receive services is just criminal . . .” She displayed photos and said they show the buildings are “in good condition . . . According to the VA’s report . . . there was no

damage to the buildings [from the 1994 Northridge earthquake] . . . [As] hospitals, 250-300 veterans would be served at any one time; as apartments, only 147 . . . This land was donated to the U.S. government for a veterans hospital and medical center . . . No one has the right to lease or give it away.” (Applause.)

Bill Carter, Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 13, said, “Our veterans’ needs here in the Valley are increasing . . . We need . . . continuation of medical services here . . .” Steve Palmer, Disabled American Veterans and other organizations Member, expressed, “the Sepulveda VA was a top hospital in the country at one time . . . New Directions and [ACOF] are supported by 15 huge developers . . . Why do they need a 75-year lease? Iraq and Afghanistan veterans . . . are not getting the help they deserve . . . The VA is shirking its duty . . . The agenda behind it is millions of dollars . . .”

A number of veterans spoke in support of the project. Kerry Bailey said, “New Directions changed my life.” Michael Malone said, “If it wasn’t for New Directions, [he] wouldn’t even be standing here . . . without affordable housing, how’ll veterans get [help]?” Glenn Barry questioned, “It’s not about making a choice . . . between a hospital [and housing] . . . How come we can’t do both?” Larry Neal said, “New Directions got me to rediscover who I was.” James Wolford said, “New Directions supervised me getting back on the mental illness drugs I take every day.”

Nichan Kulukian, Board Member, North Hills West NC and Chair of their Land Use Committee, claimed that “those who’re for this project are either paid employees or patients of New Directions . . . [ACOF and New Directions] ignored [a potential 175-unit] site that would’ve cost \$85,000 per unit . . . The [Sepulveda VA site] would cost \$347,000 per unit . . .” Robert Rosebrock, a veteran, said, “In an 1888 deed . . . it states six times that [the property should be] `permanent’ housing . . . One of the wealthiest schools in the nation has a lease [at the] West L.A. [VA facility] . . . We need to keep this for the veterans.” Angeline Krolnik, who has many family members who’re veterans, said that, if a veteran living at the proposed facility has a medical emergency, “where will they go? . . . The veterans [wouldn’t have] their own kitchens; it’s a community kitchen.” Don Goldman, veteran and long-time Directors Guild of America Member, said “No [film] production company would ever allow their cast or crew to work in a building that’s not structurally sound . . . They couldn’t obtain any kind of insurance [if the buildings had asbestos and other conditions] . . . Those buildings are habitable . . . Projected [filming] income is \$7 million per year . . . [The developers] would get 90% of that income.”

Lloyd Ray, Board Member, North Hills West NC, said “I got a copy of the lease when [ACOF] and New Directions wouldn’t give us a copy . . . I’ve been in the real estate business for [a very long time] and I’ve never seen a lease like this . . . [The] enhanced-use lease . . . allows the VA to deed the land to the developer any time during the 75-year lease . . . Once developers get a hold of [the property], they can do whatever they want with it . . . What New Directions says they’re going to do does not go along with what’s written . . . They want to build a giant sober living home.” Jerry Schwartz, veteran, said “Veterans in the community have clearly stated the buildings must be

recommissioned as medical buildings . . . The VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] recently opposed the use of enhanced-use leases . . . A 75-year lease is tantamount to forever . . . The lease . . . doesn't mention any payment for the property . . ." He claimed that "the [VA] has violated several federal statutes in [their handling of the project] . . . What's better, providing housing for 147 veterans or helping thousands of veterans on an outpatient basis?"

Tesa Becica said, "The LAPD [L.A. Police Dept.] has come out against this [project] . . . There're other things . . . that've already eaten into the land . . ." She claimed that "Sepulveda [VA employees] have a gag order to not talk about this . . . they're afraid they'll lose their jobs . . ." Mark Reed, 27th Congressional District Candidate, said "we owe [veterans] more . . . We've seen our government break agreements . . . [Veterans] need these sanctuaries . . . free from private developers . . ." Ms. Reinis offered, "We would be happy to go with [veterans] to Washington to get more services for the Sepulveda VA."

PRNC Board Members spoke. Ms. Cracium and Ms. Leveque would like to see a hospital [on the property]. Mr. Aregs would, too, and noted that New Directions can get land in "much cheaper" places. Ms. Hammarlund said the land was deeded "as a hospital . . . A lot of people are going to get rich from this." Mr. Nagai said the project is "troubling . . . there's no talk about changing the terms of the lease . . ." Mr. Singh and Mr. Chauhan believed that the land should be kept for the veterans.

Mr. Aregs requested and Mr. Mitchell agreed that the Board will vote on the project at the next PRNC General Board Meeting.

Mr. Mitchell declared and it was agreed to **ADJOURN** the Meeting at 9:44 p.m.