



Civic University 2.0

Group Presentations
Monday, February 5, 2018
Los Angeles City Hall

Judges

- Judge 1: Ana Guerrero, Chief of Staff for Los Angeles City Mayor Eric Garcetti
- Judge 2: Ron Galperin, Los Angeles City Controller
- Judge 3: William A. Covino, President of Cal State LA

Group 1: Homelessness

Ana Guerrero: Your presentation was very articulate. I think any one of you folks could run for office tomorrow. Group 1 spoke about an issue that is very close to my heart. I was just telling President Covino that I spend about half of my time on homelessness. As the Mayor may have shared with you last week, this is the number one issue that he spends most of his time on. You did a good job of laying out the costs of purchasing the site and recognizing the important roles the city and county play in making this a successful project. Noticeably, you did a wonderful job demonstrating you have local grassroots support, neighborhood support, business support, and the bid; which is critical. I heard you thank your councilmember, but an important part of any strategy is making sure that you have the ownership of the specific councilmember. One of the things that you probably learned while researching is that in order to move forward with any kind of shelter project a City Councilmember needs to initiate a Council motion. Even though the Mayor may want to build shelters everywhere, we need to work closely with the Councilmember involved. In the future, you may want to think about creative ways to make this project good for the neighborhood and sustainable in the long term, such as ongoing funding. Initially, you may find a property to use as a temporary shelter for the first year or two and then you may be able to secure permanent supportive housing for the homeless. I love the way you took responsibility; it is exactly what we all need to do. If you start a campaign like this, I suggest you encourage all of your Neighborhood Council colleagues and allies to share in the solution and propose similar projects in their districts. I was very inspired to work with you on behalf of the Mayor's office moving forward to ensure that a project like this happens. We need more people like you pushing forward specific solutions to help our unsheltered homeless population find shelter and housing, and to keep them safe.

Group 2: Public recreation facilities at high schools

William A. Covino: Good work. I like the idea, especially because institutions like universities have needs for things like pools and recreational facilities. We find that one of the most effective arguments for broadening the use of the facilities is making them available for the community to come in to use and benefit from them. The data and research you presented, such as letters of support, population support, and health facts, were good. I was wondering if there was anything surprising that you could cite that we would not have been already familiar with. We know that there are health benefits and we know that the community is supportive. You addressed the 50/50 partnerships and sustainability in a good way by discussing how, with community participation, it will become a revenue generating facility that will maintain and sustain it as the years pass. You spoke very well and I was engaged all the way along.

Group 3: Surveys

Ron Galperin: What you noted is absolutely correct: the community, in many ways, is divided. There are many different opinions and many shades of opinions to this. I love the idea of doing a survey and of finding out what people are thinking. I would have liked to have had some sense of what some of the questions might be on that survey. That would have been a helpful thing to know. I also have put my City Controller hat on: I suggest that instead of saying, that a survey for one neighborhood council that costs \$40,000 could be used for almost 100 neighborhood councils which could translate to almost \$4 million, you may say that other neighborhood councils may use it as a template for future surveys on this issue, which may save them money. They do not all have to cost that amount of money. This survey may have city wide approach to that could cost less than \$40,000 per district. You are putting your finger on one of the vital issues. I will give a little plug on something we did in the City Controller's office. We created a map which identifies the locations of dispensaries. My purpose in doing so is to provide choices. Some people who purchase marijuana may not care where they buy but I think most people when given the choice between buying from a legitimate place that is paying their taxes versus one that is not will hopefully make a better choice. By conducting a survey you can learn an awful lot about a community's interests of dispensaries and where they should or should not be located. I think it is vital for what you said is a "safe and sane" public policy. Thank you so much for a great presentation and also for showing the panoply of views on this issue. I look forward of hearing more about putting something in place.

Group 4: Speed bumps

Ana Guerrero: Clearly, all of the groups have spent a lot of time in their breakout sessions talking about the importance of getting broad-based community support for your initiatives. This is reflected in your presentations, because you have shown grassroots community and business support. As organizers, it is one of the first things we learn do when trying to get a “yes” answer from a public official or a governmental entity. In this case, you specifically mentioned the unique individuals within the local school district that attend community meetings and that you have the support of your specific councilmember. To reiterate, you want to always be very clear about who your champion is going to be in each of your issues. One thing I would add for you to think about is how to connect to the broader picture, namely, the efforts that already exist in Los Angeles. As you may know, the City has Vision Zero which is a long-term ambitious plan to make our streets safer for pedestrians. It is smart, politically, to connect something from your neighborhood to a broader vision that our elected officials or politicians have set for the entire city as a way to help them meet their goals. Finally, I want to commend you for recognizing the tension that exists between all of these different stake holders when you do some of these things. You may be aware of the tension that exists among commuters, drivers, and neighborhood residents in Mar Vista and Venice over a Councilmember’s support of the installation of bike lanes intended to make our streets safer for pedestrians. You are not taking on something easy. Understanding that tension allows you to be creative about solutions and enables you to be more open minded about what you initially propose. As you move forward with the campaign and take into account the realities that exists in the City, you may need to readjust your strategy and ask.

Ron Galperin: I am violating the rules here but I felt that I had to absolutely weigh in on this one. You may have noticed me limping slightly as I walked in here. A little over two months ago, I was crossing the street and I got hit a car and thrown. Thankfully, I have made huge progress and will be off the cane soon. But I went, in a very short period of time, from using a wheelchair, to walker, to crutches, and now just the cane. I learned a lot about this issue first hand. Interestingly enough, when I was in the hospital for surgery I had here in Los Angeles, it turn out that in the room right next door to me was a friend of mine who had also been run over by a car the day before as well. This happens more often than we even realize. The more people I speak to the more I hear about this happening to pedestrians and cyclists. You are also putting your finger on one of the most vital issues in LA. The #1 responsibility that governments have is to make sure people are safe. We cannot guarantee that everyone will be safe all the time. We cannot prevent every accident. However, what you are doing is vital for the safety of a community. I want to give you kudos for taking on this issue. I urge each and every one of you to continue being involved in this issue because, along with others such as Vision Zero, it is going to continue to be an issue about how we keep people safe.

Group 5: Trash

William A. Covino: I was really hoping for some more detail on the pollution reduction in Vernon which is on your chart but I believe you. This presentation was very good. Specifically, I was engaged by all of the revenue benefits, like the increase in space occupancy tax revenue and the job creation opportunities. These are the kinds of things that would not automatically occur to someone who was concentrating on just having a cleaner and nicer looking space. I thought that was an effective dimension of this presentation. I am always thinking of ongoing sustainability and we have an ongoing maintenance proposal. However, I was not clear how long this initiative would last or how it would be funded beyond the proposed time period. Other than that this is, by far, probably the most engaging discussion of trash that I have heard in a long time so thank you.

Group 6: Potholes

Ron Galperin: I love the visuals. Wow! I also loved how you engaged everyone out here to advocate and lobby along with you. That really shows the decision-makers just how passionate people are about this issue. This is really how the rubber meets the road. Forgive me for saying that. By the way, LA has seen a huge improvement on the number of potholes that get filled. It has been a priority among others in the Mayor's office. It has also been issue of great interest to me. There this thing called "Street Damage Restoration Fees (SDRF)" that are supposed to be paid by utility companies because when they cut into the streets it is often a precursor to the potholes that we see. I have been arguing for an increase in what the utility companies should pay for making those cuts. This will be my little advertising for this evening. I encourage you to request the council to actually pass the new and revised charges for Street Damage Restoration Fees (SDRF) which will bring millions of dollars more for potholes. What we are realizing is that there is no way to galvanize a community quite so much as by focusing on potholes. I think it was a wonderful presentation. Give it up for them. Thank you so much.

Group 7: Bike lanes

Ana Guerrero: That was amazing! I was an organizer because I liked the thrill of a good campaign, winning and fighting for something that would make my neighborhood better and improve the quality of life for those that were less advantaged. I also enjoy the sense of community that you get from working together on something. You reminded us that this is what cities are all about; going through the process all together as neighbors and people to figure out problems. I would totally give you \$50,000 in a second just for that. You did a good job of demonstrating your broad base support and that you are all calling out your specific council members because accountability is critical for successful organizing. I love the fact that you presented the data and a tragic story which humanized this issue for all of us. Your solution was well thought-out and inclusive as you talked about both the positive aspects of getting on your bike and taking things slow, and the importance of the safety of our cyclists. Again, I would encourage you to think about how to connect these initiatives to broader city goals to go bigger than your council district or the specific commercial district. We may use these 10 years to prepare for the Olympics by completing our City-wide bicycling system and increasing opportunities to become healthier through this initiative. I want to commend you for taking on a very challenging issue because, as you probably all know, this question of installing more bike lanes creates a lot of strong emotions. Sometimes, businesses are not in favor of them because it makes it difficult for people to park in neighborhoods and use the commercial services there. So thank you for taking on these issues, that are difficult to solve, at the Neighborhood Council level. It is very inspiring.

Closing remarks

William A. Covino: Everybody sounded great. You gave presentations that were well put together by moving from point to point and repeating key points in ways that were persuasive. I was often reminded of things that maybe I had not heard in the same way the first time. There was good focus in what you were saying. It was not all over the place. You picked your spots, made arguments for them, and moved on from there. I know how difficult that is especially when you start as a big group, around a big table, and are looking at each other saying to yourselves, “what do we do now?” You did great work. Congratulations.

Ron Galperin: Every one of you in each of the groups injected just the right amount of humor, humanity, and thoughtfulness in all of these presentations and that is what it takes. I saw that there were three elements that went into each of these. First, is the research that you have got to do because there needs to be substance to what you are presenting. Second, is collaboration because nothing gets done in a community unless you have a group of people working together. You may start off with not necessarily agreeing on everything. You may even end up not necessarily agreeing on everything. But you may find that common ground to come together. I think you did an excellent job at collaborating with each other. The third element is persuasion. There are times when you may have all of the facts on your side, be very organized but you are not necessarily able to persuade others of what it is that you feel so passionate about. Each group found a way to do that. I think it is very impressive and inspiring. I cannot wait to see what each of you do in your own communities and neighborhood councils as you take this exercise, translate it into the real world, and are actually able to achieve results in the community. Kudos to all of you and congratulations.

Ana Guerrero: Like my fellow judges I am truly inspired by what I saw today. You all were really amazing and have come out of this Civic U experience with an understanding of the importance of coalition and getting complicated things done. Also, you got the importance of having fun. As people in government and people in our Neighborhood Councils, we have an obligation to make civic participation fun and sexy so that more people get involved with us to make our City better. Lastly, I want to mention that this experience tonight reminded me of some of the things that I learned as an organizer. The most sustainable and desirable power, and the powerful people that I admire the most are those that share power and have power *with* instead of over others. I really saw that here today in the way that you shared leadership, responsibilities, discussed some of the challenges in pursuing your initiatives, and your understanding of the complications and tensions with and among stakeholders. I hope that you take what you have learned here back to your neighborhoods. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us and reminding me of why organizing and participation is such an amazing experience and something that we should all be involved in.