*REVISED 2/10/23

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**KAREN BASS
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February 10, 2023

Honorable Members of the Neighborhoods
and Community Enrichment Committee
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 340, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: THIS REPORT REVISES 11-29-22 CF 21-0407 REPORT RE: Neighborhood Council/Standardize Election Rules / Stakeholder Participation **(Rodriguez/Cedillo) to the previously named** Arts, Parks, Health, Education, and Neighborhoods Committee.

BACKGROUND

On April 14, 2021, Councilmember Monica Rodriguez introduced a motion, seconded by Councilmember Gil Cedillo, regarding voter identification and other participation requirements in neighborhood council elections. Analysis of various aspects of neighborhood council elections were requested from the Offices of the City Attorney, City Clerk, and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

The motion, Council File 21-0407, instructs the Department to *"report with a survey of Neighborhood Council Election rules, with an analysis on how the bylaws of different Neighborhood Councils vary on election issues, including, but not limited to: eligibility requirements for Board seats, governing board structure, stakeholder requirements, and stakeholder verification."* In this report, we have analyzed the primary features of neighborhood council bylaws and election rules.

While NCs are not completely autonomous, their relative independence is achieved through the ability of a board to self-determine, through their bylaws, board seat types and structure,

and voter eligibility requirements, as well as participation rules. The Department has prepared an analysis of the requirements for neighborhood council board seats and voters, in addition to an analysis of aspects of the 2020- 2021 NC elections. Our analysis focuses on the following four topics: NC board structure, voter turnout, eligibility verification, and the number of people who attempted to participate in the 2021 election.

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  There were ninety-one neighborhood councils scheduled to have elections during the 2020-2021 period, three fewer than the 94 scheduled for the 2018-2019 period. However, elections were not scheduled for all of the 91 due to an absence of the required candidate configuration needed to trigger an election. Meaning, some did not have enough candidates in competitive races, and in those cases, candidates were seated by board affirmation without an election.

The Department has also created an [NC Election Comparison Tool (2019-2021)](): an innovative dashboard that provides a means of comparing election results systemwide, regionally, by City Council and by neighborhood council. It utilizes data from the 2019 and 2021 election seasons.

ELECTION ANALYSIS

Overview of Voter Turn-Out

The 2019 election was an at-poll election. The 2021 election was an all-Vote-By-Mail (VBM) election. Of the ninety-one neighborhood councils scheduled to hold elections in 2021, sixty-five also held elections in 2019.

There were 2.5% more candidates in the 2021 election than in the 2019 election for the ninety-one neighborhood council scheduled for elections. For those holding elections in both election years, a 2.3% increase in the number of candidates was reported.

Turnout and median income

Income did not appear to be a factor influencing voter turnout. The neighborhood council with the highest median income ($200K) reported 102 votes cast. The neighborhood council with one of the lowest number of votes cast (6) has a median household income of $33K. Further examination may be necessary to consider possible cross-factors that might change this determination

Turnout and internet access

Access to the internet in the neighborhood council's service area appears not to be a factor influencing voter turnout in 2021. Neighborhoods with less reliable access to the Internet had similar turnout to other neighborhoods with more reliable access to the internet. However, none of the NCs in areas where fewer households had internet access had a higher turnout.

Since this analysis is fairly broad, further examination may be necessary to consider possible cross -factors that might change this determination.

2021 Results
Voter turnout for the ninety-one neighborhood councils scheduled to hold elections in 2021 was 17,577. This was a reduction of 4,408 votes compared with turnout in 2019 (-20%).

Additional analysis of all of the NCs scheduled to hold elections in 2021 shows there were 8,336 people in 2021 who requested ballots, but did not return their ballots (i.e., people who did not vote). We then compared the voter turnout in 2019 (21,985) with what would have been the turnout if the 8,336 had cast their ballots. We added together the number who voted in 2021 (17,577) with the number who attempted to vote (8,336) but did not cast their ballot, which totaled 25,913 people. This suggests an increase of 3,928 people who attempted to participate OR participated in the 2021 election (+18%) when compared with 2019.

Comparison with 2019
Voter turnout for the sixty-five neighborhood councils that were scheduled to hold elections in 2021 which also held elections in 2019 was 16,828. This was a reduction of -1,633 votes from voter turnout in 2019 (-8.85%).

Analysis of the sixty-five NCs that held elections in 2019 and 2021 reported 7,951 people in 2021 who requested ballots, but did not return their ballot - did not vote. When added to the number who voted (16,828), this represents a total of 24,779 (+6,318 more people) who attempted to participate or participated in the 2021 election when compared with the 18,461 in 2019 (+34%).

 Further discussion on the topic of the number of ballots not returned is provided below.

Board Structure
Neighborhood council board seats are either **at-large seats or categorical seats**. At-large seats are open to any type of candidate or voter. Categorical seats are those where candidates and in some cases voters for these seats must belong to an internal district within the NC, or be a stakeholder of a certain type. Such would be the case with a business representative seat, for example.

The Department reviewed the bylaws of approximately one-third of the neighborhood councils to collect a sampling of the types of eligibility requirements reflected in governing board seats. A total of one-hundred and thirty unique board seat types were found amongst the 33 neighborhood councils included in the sample - the full list is attached to this report.

To explain further, the Election Comparison Tool may be filtered by *at-large* seats vs. *categorical seats*. For all 91 neighborhood councils scheduled for elections in 2021, those with *at-large* board structures (9) represented a smaller share of votes and ballots not returned. Neighborhood Councils with categorical board structures experienced a reduction in voter turnout, whereas Neighborhood Councils with at-large board structures experienced an increase in voter turnout.

Board Structure (91 NCs scheduled to have elections)	2019 Voter Turnout	2021 Voter Turnout	No. of Ballots not returned	Change in Voter turnout From 2019
At -Large (9 NCs)	1,374	1,740	686	+26.64%
Categorical (82 NCs)	20,611	15,837	7,650	-23.16%
Total	**21,985**	**17,577**	**8,336**	**-20.05%**

Eligibility Verification (documentation vs. self-affirmation)
Neighborhood Councils determine how voters will verify their stakeholder eligibility in order to vote in neighborhood council elections. Neighborhood Councils select either "**documentation**" or "**self-affirmation**" style verification. This refers to their means of stakeholder verification to determine voter eligibility. Forty-one neighborhood councils have chosen the documentation method. 52 have chosen the self-affirmation method.

To receive a ballot in self-affirmation elections, voters must fill out a form with their name, local address, and stakeholder type. Then, they must sign it as a sworn statement of stakeholdership. Voters in documentation-style elections must provide, at a minimum, proof of identity, age, and local address, such as would be found on a current driver's license. But if a NC has categorical requirements for voters, they may need to provide additional documents. Unlike district seats, these requirements are not tied to geography but to stakeholder type.

For example, if only renters can vote for renters representative candidates, then a voter may need to show a copy of a lease or letter from a landlord. A wide range of document types are accepted by City Clerk as proof of stakeholdership in NC elections. The City Clerk has also put in place special provisions for unhoused voters to prove their eligibility.

For further information about this complex dynamic see our article "How Voter Verification

Works" for the breakdown of the 3 NC voter verification styles in the recent Elections newsletter http://tiny.cc/NCElectionsOverview.

Show less

Voter Turnout

> *"NOTE: Some Neighborhood Council's election participation bylaws allow voters to be eligible for multiple ballots. This occurs when an NC has board seats representing specific stakeholder types __and__ their election participation rules only allow other stakeholders of the same type to vote for these seats. If a voter qualifies for more than one type of stakeholdership, they will be able to obtain multiple ballots in these types of elections, unless the NC's bylaws expressly prohibit receiving more than one ballot otherwise. For this reason, throughout this report, the Department's analysis has reported on the number of ballots cast."*

The Department analyzed 2021 voter turnout by the different NC voter eligibility verification methods described above.The chart shows how self-affirmation NCs reported fourteen fewer ballots, on average, as compared with NCs using the documentation method. NCs using the documentation method reported 2,923 more votes cast when compared with NCs using the self-affirmation method. However, what cannot be determined is whether people decide not to participate in an NCs election after becoming familiar with any applicable documentation requirements. A survey of potential eligible voters in each category would be needed to assess this possibility.

Eligibility Method (91 NCs scheduled to have elections)	Voter Turnout	Total # of Ballots not returned	Avg # unreturned ballots per NC
Self-Affirmation (48 or 53%)	7,327	4,093	85
Documentation (43 or 47%)	10,250	4,243	99

About People Attempting to Participate

Voter turnout would have increased in <u>almost</u> all neighborhood councils, when analyzing the number of people who did not return their ballots after submitting their application to vote-by-mail. When examining the City Council Districts with the greatest number of ballots not returned in the 2021 election, 92% of the 8,336 ballots not returned were in five City Council districts (pre-2021 redistricting):

Council Districts with Greatest Number of Ballots Not Returned in 2021 Election (Pre-2021 Redistricting Changes) **D=Documentation and SA=Self Affirmation**

Council District	Votes by Eligibility Method	No. of Ballots Not returned
Council District 4	<u>13 NCs = 3,469 votes</u> 5 NCs D = 815 8 NCs SA = 2,654	<u>1,691 not returned</u> 5 NCs D = 399 8 NC SA = 1,292
Council District 11	<u>4 NCs = 5,841votes</u> 4 NCs D = 5,841 0 NCs SA = N/A	<u>2,208 not returned</u> 4 NCs D = 2,208 0 NCs SA = N/A
Council District 5	<u>7 NCs = 2,388 votes</u> 2 NCs D = 282 5 NCs SA = 2,106	<u>1,584 not returned</u> 2 NCs D = 117 5 NCs SA = 1,467
Council District 13	<u>9 NCs = 1,325 votes</u> 2 NCs D = 27 7 NCs SA = 1,298	<u>1,248 not returned</u> 2 NCs D = 42* 7 NCs SA = 1,206 *an update for Rampart Village will be published in the next dashboard update.*

Council District 1	<u>13 NCs = 1,399 votes</u> 13 NCs D = 925 4 NCs SA = 474	<u>1,007 not returned</u> 13 NCs D = 559 4 NCs SA = 448

CONCLUSION

The most significant factors affecting voter turnout were reflected in the number of ballots not returned are listed below:

1. NCs with *categorical* <u>board structures (90% of the NCs scheduled to hold elections)</u> experienced the greatest share of votes, but also the greatest number of ballots not returned.
2. Simillarly, NCs with documentation-style voter verification methods also had a higher voter participation rate, as well as a higher rate of non-return, when it came to returning mail ballots. 2,923 more ballots were cast in the elections of NCs who required voters to provide documentation than in elections for NCs with self-affirmation style elections. However, more of the ballots requested (150 more) also went unreturned in documentation-style elections, when compared to self-affirmation elections.
3. The Office of the City Clerk has indicated it will ensure the handbook and corresponding registration documents include consular documents to its list of acceptable documentation to establish eligibility.

However, the data shows that there were 25,913 individuals who engaged in the elections for the ninety-one neighborhood councils scheduled to hold elections. Although there was a greater number of individuals compared to the last voting period, there were 8,336 individuals who requested ballots but did not vote, meaning they did not return their ballots. Of those, more than 92% were from NCs with categorical eligibility requirements (7,650). The greatest concentration of voters who did not return their ballots were in 5 Council Districts: Districts 1, 4, 5, 11, and 13.

Fifteen of the NCs scheduled for elections in 2021 did not qualify to hold elections, due to an absence of competitive races, so they were instead seated via the board affirmation process, where certified candidates are sworn in to the seats for which they applied. This is one more board affirmation than was held in the previous election cycle.

Of the 15 NCs that had board affirmations, twelve have *categorical* board structures. This trend should be closely monitored as it indicates that there are challenges and barriers to overcome in order to expand stakeholder participation in and awareness of these NCs, but it

is not clear whether the structure of these NCs is itself presenting a barrier to participation. Since participation in an NC's election is more likely to follow from earlier entry-level engagement, board affirmations can also be said to arise from limited awareness and engagement of stakeholders in the NC, as engagement is what sustains a constant supply and balanced pool of prospective candidates.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact with the report.

Respectfully,

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Raquel Beltran, General Manager
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

ATTACHMENT 'A'
SURVEY OF GOVERNING BOARD SEATS ON 33 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS
A total of 130 unique governing board seat types were found in a sample of 33 NCs:

#	Seat Type	#	Seat Type	#	Seat Type
1	At-Large Representative	31	Bel Air Crest Master Association	61	Corresponding Secretary
2	Business Owner Representative	32	Bel-Air Glen District	62	Communication Secretary
3	Community Based Representative	33	Bel Air Hills Association	63	Home/Condo Owners Representative
4	Home/Condo Owner	34	Bel Air Ridge HOA	64	Residential Renters Representative
5	Renter Representative	35	Bel Air Ridge HOA Alternate	65	Retail/Service Business Representative
6	School Representative	36	Bel-Air District	66	Community Service Organization Representative
7	Senior Representative	37	Benedict Canyon Association	67	Community Based Organizations Representative
8	Youth Representatives	38	Casiano Estates Association	68	Senior Group Representative
9	Arts District Resident Representative	39	Commercial or Office Enterprise Districts	69	Schools Representative
10	Business Owner, Employee, Non Profit Representative	40	Community Interest At-Large Board Member	70	Faith Based Organizations Representative
11	Little Tokyo Resident Representative	41	Community Interest At-Large Alternate	71	Youth Group Representative
12	Little Tokyo At Large Business Owner, Employee, Non-Profit Representative	42	Custodian of Open Spaces	72	Sergeant at Arms
13	Little Tokyo Property Owner Representative	43	Doheny Sunset Plaza Neighborhood Association	73	Education Representative
14	Montecito Heights Representative	44	Faith-Based Institutions	74	Senior Citizen Representative
15	Monterey Hills Representatives	45	Franklin-Coldwater District	75	Youth Representative
16	Mount Washington Representative	46	Holmby Hills HOA	76	Outreach Officer
17	Sycamore Grove Representatives	47	Laurel Canyon Association	77	Communications Officer
18	Community Interest At-Large Representative	48	Laurel Canyon Association Alternate	78	Land Use Officer
19	Business Representative	49	North of Sunset District	79	Area A Director
20	Central Atwater Representative	50	North of Sunset District Alternate	80	Area B Director
21	Community Group/Non-Profit Representative	51	Private 7-12 Schools	81	Area C Director
22	Education Representative	52	Private K-6 Schools	82	Area D Director
23	Faith-Based Organizations Representative	53	Public Educational Institutions	83	Area E Director
24	North Atwater Representative	54	Residents of Beverly Glen	84	Area F Director
25	South Atwater Representative	55	Area 1 Seat	85	Area G Director
26	Vice President of Operations	56	Area 2 Seat	86	Area H Director
27	Vice President of Legislative Affairs	57	Area 3 Seat	87	Board Member
28	At-Large Traditional Stakeholder	58	Area 4 Seat	88	Vice President Communications and Outreach
29	At-Large Youth Representative	59	Community Seat	89	Vice President of Administration
30	Bel Air Association	60	Community Interest Seat	90	Area-Wide Stakeholder Board Member

91	At-Large Stakeholder Board Member	121	District 2 Representative
92	Center City East Business Director	122	District 3 Representative
93	Center City East Residential Director	123	District 4 Representative
94	Civic Center/Financial District Business Director	124	District 5 Representative
95	Fashion District Business Director	125	District 6 Representative
96	Fashion District Residential Director	126	Homeless & Displacement Prevention Representative
97	Historic Core Business Director	127	Public Health & SafetyRepresentative
98	Historic Core Business Director	128	Arts & Culture Representative
99	Social Service Providers (SSP)	129	Tenant Representative
100	South Park Business Director	130	Property Owner Representative
101	South Park Residential Director		
102	Historic Core Resident Alternate		
103	South Park Resident Alternate		
104	South Park Resident Director Alternate		
105	Social Service Providers (SSP) Alternate		
106	Arts Director		
107	Boulevards Director		
108	Business Director		
109	Education Director		
110	Elder Director		
111	Public Safety Director		
112	Social Justice Director		
113	Sustainability Director		
114	Youth Director		
115	Immediate Past President		
116	Sub-District 1 Director		
117	Sub-District 2 Director		
118	Sub-District 3 Director		
119	Sub-District 4 Director		
120	District 1 Representative		