

May 25, 2011

TO: Governing Board
Westwood Neighborhood Council

RE: Grievance Filed by Roxane Stern

The WWNC Grievance Committee is pleased to report its findings and recommendations after review of the grievance filed by Roxane Stern with the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners on March 9, 2011 and an amendment to that grievance filed by Ms. Stern on April 12, 2011.

As provided in the By-laws of the Westwood Neighborhood Council, the grievance review committee comprised two sitting members of the WWNC Board of Governors and two community stakeholders. The Board members were Stephen Resnick and Clayton Schudy. Brant Feldman and Carole Magnuson were stakeholder members. The meeting was scheduled by Mr. Resnick and an agenda for the meeting was duly posted in accordance with the Brown Act on the Westwood Neighborhood Council website (<http://www.wwnc.org>).

Mr. Resnick convened the meeting in the Multipurpose Room of St. Paul the Apostle Church, 10750 Ohio Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024, at 4:11 p.m. on May 19, 2011. Those present in addition to the members of the committee were Ms. Stern and Joyce Rich, a community stakeholder.

Following acceptance of the agenda, Ms. Stern was invited to present the issues set forth in her letters of grievance. Because of the number of issues raised in those documents, it was decided to go through the documents and to discuss the topics in sequence.

Ms. Stern had organized the issues in her March 9, 2011 document in three principle categories, **Outreach, Brown Act and Rules of Order**, and **Ethics and Participation**. The April 12, 2011 document added comments to the previous Ethics section and added comments under a new heading entitled **Mission**. The April amendment also registered grievances regarding scheduling of the grievance committee meeting, identification of entries under the “press” tab on the website, failure of DONE to provide a representative for WWNC meetings, and failure of the WWNC Board to respond in a satisfactory manner to stakeholder suggestions at meetings.

OUTREACH: At the time of her original grievance, Ms. Stern believed that the Board was failing to take advantage of all available resources to achieve a satisfactory level of outreach to the stakeholder community, which suggested to her that an effort was being made to create the WWNC as a closed group. Specifically, she faulted the Board for failing to email meeting notification to stakeholders and for failing to post pertinent information on its website. Ms. Stern now acknowledges improvements in the website

and outreach since March, when she filed her grievance, the Communications Committee has enriched the content of the WWNC website and continues to add features. Ms. Stern would like to see more postings about WWNC activities and increased use of an email database for outreach. The WWNC currently posts notices of its meetings publicly at the places required by the By-laws, and provides stakeholders with the ability to request email notification of meetings and events on its website.

The agenda posted for the March 31, 2011 meeting of the Communications Committee includes discussion of many of the points raised by Ms. Stern, as follows:

2. WWNC website updates (discussion of current site and possible added improvements)
3. Discussion of community involvement mechanisms on website
4. Discussion of permissions for maintenance of site by committee members
5. Discussion of community outreach venues / websites
6. Possible collaboration with other NC's on outreach venues, ideas
7. Discussion of establishment of email blasts, email groups for disseminating WWNC material / info.

Ms. Stern raised questions about the reporting of the process by which the web site development company was selected. Minutes posted on the website indicate that selection of a web company was approved unanimously at the February 9, 2011 meeting of the Board, but the minutes do not capture the discussion. Board meetings are not recorded and not all committees post minutes on the website

Finding and recommendation: The Grievance Committee concluded that in its first few months of existence, the WWNC has made satisfactory progress in outreach by posting notices as required in the By-Laws and by developing a website, by establishing email blasts and email groups for communicating with stakeholders, and by training board members in maintenance of the site, and that it is moving forward to develop electronic techniques to communicate more directly and more often with stakeholders.

The Committee believes that increasing the amount of information available to stakeholders and the ease of obtaining it will nourish and invigorate stakeholder involvement in and awareness of the WWNC, and recommends:

- a. that the WWNC solicit ideas for improvement of the website from stakeholders, particularly those who have skills in electronic communications;
- b. that minutes of committee meetings be posted on the website, in order to make the fullest range of information about Board actions available to stakeholders; and
- c. that the WWNC investigate technologies such as "Dragon Dictation" that could allow the Board to record its meetings and upload them to the website at a low cost
- d. that the menu choice "press" be renamed to suggest the actual sources of the material posted and that a url link be provided for media postings.

BROWN ACT AND RULES OF ORDER: Ms. Stern noted that at the time of her grievance filing committees had not notified stakeholders of their meetings or involved

non-elected stakeholders as participants on committees, nor had any committees established subcommittees. Ms. Stern acknowledged that committees are now posting notices of meeting on the WWNC website.

Finding and recommendation: The Committee concluded that the WWNC By-laws have not been violated since they do not require that the WWNC committees have non-elected stakeholder members, nor are committees required to have subcommittees. The Committee believes that Subcommittees will develop and in fact are developing as a function of each committee's work plan, although at present they include only elected Board members. The Committee believes that as the workload increases, the WWNC will benefit from encouraging volunteer participation on subcommittees and at committee meetings. The Committee recommends:

- a. that committee meetings be posted on the website and that a statement welcoming attendance by stakeholders be included, and
- b. that a calendar of monthly events, including meetings, be posted on the website and posted with the agenda of the monthly meeting at the public places required.

Ms. Stern raised questions about the conduct of meetings, specifically the addition of urgent items to the agenda and inequitable treatment of speakers during meetings. The Committee noted that Bylaws provide for the addition of items that require urgent items to the agenda, and that Board members may discuss agenda items at length or not, according to their own predilection. DONE staff informed the Committee that the WWNC may not require speakers to fill out speaker cards, but it may establish procedures for receiving stakeholder comment. The Committee believes that orderly and equitable participation is absolutely necessary to the productive functioning of the WWNC and recommends:

- a. that the WWNC chair announce standards of behavior to ensure that business is conducted in a civil manner as well as consequences for disregard of those standards at the start of each meeting;
- b. that the WWNC continue to ask speakers to fill out cards, but that it allow any speaker who refuses to provide the information to speak in his or her turn;
- c. that no person be allowed to speak a second time until all persons have spoken a first time, unless a Board member poses a question to the person;
- d. that Board members and stakeholders consider taking training in Rosenberg's Rules offered on the DONE website

ETHICS AND PARTICIPATION: Ms. Stern asserted that not all members of the WWNC Board had completed ethics training as required by law, and that not all members had participated in the budget survey as requested by the Mayor. She further objected to two Board Members identifying themselves as members of the WWNC Board on a petition published in the Daily Bruin dealing with an issue on which the WWNC had no position.

The DONE representative indicated that she believes that all of the Board members have now completed the Ethics Training. The Committee asked the DONE representative review the status of the Board members regarding the Ethics Training and

to report the names of any members who have not taken Ethics Training to the President of the Board. The DONE representative agreed with the Committee that use of elected titles as identification is common practice and acceptable so long as the use is clearly as for identification purposes only. Participation in the Mayor's budget survey was not mandatory. In regards to the issue of Ethics Training, the Committee concluded that all members of the Board have had ample time to complete the requirement and recommends:

a. that any member of the Board who has not completed Ethics Training should not be allowed to vote on items before the Board until the member has satisfied the Ethics Training requirement in the WWNC Bylaws.

APRIL 12 ISSUES: In addition to the issues addressed above, Ms. Stern questioned a mission statement proposed as a bylaws amendment and the propriety of a comment from a Board Member that she felt indicated a bias toward homeowner interests. The Committee noted that the bylaw amendment in question was no longer proposed, so the issue is moot. In regard to the larger issue underlying much of the grievance presented by Ms. Stern, that of homeowner interest bias of the Board, the Committee noted that the WWNC votes unanimously on many questions put to it, and that on the important issue of amending the Bylaws, homeowner residential representatives were outvoted by a significant majority at the last meeting. The Committee found that, as intended, each member brings to the Board the perspective of a distinct stakeholder group, but that the Board as a whole has shown itself capable of acting in concert for the welfare of the larger community. The Committee also finds value in avoiding positions and statements that would appear to inhibit free expression of opinion among WWNC Board Members and stakeholders alike.

The Committee did not find that Ms. Stern's comments regarding scheduling of the Grievance Committee meeting indicated anything other than the difficulty of coordinating her calendar and the calendars of the Committee members, but it would like to recommend:

- a. that in the case that a grievance is filed, a committee be appointed to review the grievance, within five working days; and
- b. that the committee and the aggrieved person be required to make themselves available to meet to consider the grievance during the following ten working days at times that do not require absence from school or business for either party.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: Ms. Stern complained that recommendations from stakeholders for Board action have been ignored, and cited as examples her suggestions to install a WWNC bulletin Board at Westwood Park, her request to investigate traffic issues south of Wilshire, and her suggestion to install parking meters on Veteran. While the Committee has no evidence that the Board has ignored these requests, it is clear that

Ms. Stern and perhaps other stakeholders would like to contribute ideas to the WWNC and need to receive feedback on those ideas. In this interest, the Committee recommends

- a. that the WWNC formalize a process for receiving suggestions and comments and providing feedback regarding the disposition of those suggestions and comments (referred to committee, comment noted, etc.) The Committee suggests that the WWNC use a “suggestion box” concept, with comments and suggestions being solicited on the website and on written forms available at the meeting. One Board member, probably the secretary or the Communications Committee Chair, should be responsible for referring the suggestions to the appropriate person (e. g. transportation committee). A report on the disposition of the suggestions, i.e. to whom referred, should be available in written or oral format at each meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carole Magnuson