

Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council



IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN SUNLAND TUJUNGA

7747 Foothill Blvd., Tujunga, CA 91042 • www.stnc.org • 818-951-7411 • FAX 818-951-7412

January 31, 2007

Lisa W. Sarno, Interim General Manager
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
334-B East Second Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: AUDIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT
BY THE CITY CONTROLLER

Dear Ms. Sarno:

We have reviewed the City Controller's performance and financial audit of DONE, released on November 28, 2006 as well as your response of December 29, 2006 to this audit. We wish to thank you for your attention to these matters, and offer our assistance in carrying forth the great effort needed in the next year to accomplish these things.

We have noted that certain of the Controller's recommendations regarding the performance portion of the audit specifically impact upon the Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council (STNC). It is these recommendations and your response to them that we wish to address with the thought that by sharing our concerns we may better assist you to fulfill your mandate to assist our neighborhood council and other neighborhood councils across the City.

A discussion of each of these concerns follows the Controller's recommendation of November 28, 2006, and your response of December 29, 2006.

Our first concern is with your response to the Controller's **Recommendation # 2** which states: "To the degree feasible, DONE management should develop standardized bylaws for common operating processes and procedures for NCs, such as those governing Conflict of Interest, Code of Civility and outreach efforts to incorporate into the bylaws of each NC."

In your response to the Controller you state that "Field Operations Division will use the first quarter of 2007 to work with the Office of the City Attorney to create the NC bylaws standardized language resource document. Once a clear set of additional requirements has been established beyond what currently exists in the

Plan, the Department will be able to include additional required bylaw changes such as Codes of Civility and training mandates.”

We would like to suggest that additional required bylaw changes also include:

- Requirements for a specific and standard oath of office that commits the elected member to learning to conduct oneself appropriately within the regulations, and protocols germane to neighborhood councils.
- Latitude written into DONE’s version of the bylaws to provide for changes that promote the individuality of each neighborhood.
- Removal / replacement of a Board member.

Recommendation # 3: “DONE management should identify, prioritize and implement initiatives that will measurably increase civic participation and community representation. DONE should also provide NCs with training on how to develop and file Community Impact Statements.”

DONE’s response of December 29 notes that “DONE will continue to explore and identify additional methods in order to increase civic participation in the NC system.”

The STNC suggests that outreach should not just be a responsibility of individual NCs but of the whole NC system and suggests that DONE consider providing umbrella Outreach activities for all the NCs City wide, in several forms:

- produce promos by the City’s elected officials on commercial television (not just channel 35) and radio outlets encouraging Los Angeles residents to participate in their own neighborhood councils. These should be produced in all necessary languages for all ethnic and cultural neighborhoods in the City of Los Angeles.
- Standardize neighborhood council election days so that umbrella coverage over broad areas (such as by planning areas) can take advantage of multi NC promotion.

Recommendation # 4: “DONE management should develop performance measures to evaluate and measure progress towards achieving its mission.

Once performance measures have been established, DONE should monitor them on a regular basis to determine whether progress is being made in achieving its outcomes.”

DONE’s response of December 29 notes that as a part of their weekly duties DONE staff are to input information into the CMS which tracks this information and which will then be used to create evaluative measures that will then be shared with everyone in an annual report.

The STNC insists that DONE provide real time access to all information inputted to the CMS system that is specifically regarding the STNC, and that DONE provide a process whereby the STNC may notify DONE of errors noted in inputted information, and that a process to correct these errors be made available to all NCs.

Recommendation # 5 “DONE management should develop a comprehensive plan for the delivery of essential training to NCs. NC board members should also be required to participate in certain mandatory training courses.” [audit page 23]

DONE’s response indicates that DONE will be relying on “live” training workshops to provide NCs with necessary training. DONE has posted on its website its training schedule for January, February and March of 2007.

The STNC values these live workshops but noted that of the seven training workshops scheduled for January through March 2007, only two were to be given in the San Fernando Valley, and none were “volunteer friendly”. The STNC has a continuing need for access to training in areas that do not require “live” classroom training. The recent ethics training provided by the Ethics Commission demonstrates how the internet can be used to provide standardized training in many areas where the “live” classroom workshop atmosphere provides no additional value. Such automated training is far less expensive to produce and because it is “volunteer friendly” it delivers vital training to board members and stakeholders in a far more timely manner, than the “live” classroom training proposed by DONE.

The STNC suggests that DONE repackage its training modules to recognize the volunteer nature of neighborhood councils and to make the presentation of its training “volunteer friendly”. Training should be provided in a manner that

accommodates the volunteer nature of those who participate in neighborhood councils, and should be packaged in multiple media formats such as interactive internet training, podcasting and other 21st century media formats that interface and deal with the NCs rather than limiting training as DONE is to classroom workshops.

The STNC suggests that DONE use the above mentioned technology to create a city wide NC generated online library of best practices, methods and procedures.

The STNC also suggests that DONE prepare and present training on how to deal with City departments.

Recommendation # 6 “DONE management should clearly define the roles, responsibilities, levels and types of service that NC Project Coordinators are to provide to NCs.”

DONE’s response of December 29, 2006 noted that DONE had developed an “Advocates Handbook” that lists the duties of NC Project Coordinators and guidelines for fulfilling those duties. There is no indication that these handbooks are available to anyone outside of DONE.

The Advocate Handbook should be available to the STNC so that the STNC can be aware of the duties and responsibilities of its Project Coordinator.

Recommendation # 12 “DONE management should increase its efforts to train NC members in the use of information systems designed for NCs. NC members should, at a minimum, be trained in the use of the NC database for accessing election procedures and other important information. Where practical, the training should be computer based.”

DONE’s response of December 29 is that a newly redesigned database to include real time updates, election tracking, election procedures, election history and bylaws document management will be completed by January 30, 2007, and that training will be conducted for both Neighborhood Council leaders and DONE staff during March and April 2007.

The STNC suggests that training for use of this new database be available not only to a selected few Neighborhood Council leaders but to all NC board members and any stakeholders who wish it and that this training begin no later than March 2007.

The STNC also suggests that this database provide basic resources for NCs to establish their own websites.

The Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council looks forward to working with you and your staff regarding this audit.

Sincerely,



Cindy Cleghorn, Chairperson
Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council

cc:

Robin Kramer, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
City Controller Laura Chick
Los Angeles City Council Members
Board of Neighborhood Commissioners
Neighborhood Council Review Commission
Education & Neighborhoods Committee
Los Angeles City Neighborhood Councils