

Taking Action

Last month, during our public forum, where stakeholders are allowed up to three minutes to speak on any non-agenda item or issue within the Board's jurisdiction, we heard from three different stakeholders on three different streets with different sets of issues.

Our first presenter was from Vose Street. His concern was simply WHEN can Vose Street expect to be repaired, resurfaced, etc. as the East/West street just to the south of his home was currently being resurfaced. I spoke with him by phone twice after the meeting and visited his neighborhood to take pictures. I was also informed that he and the neighbors had petitioned and phoned their City Council member's office but did not get return phone calls. In their correspondence with DOT, they received conflicting responses quoting a wait from two months to two years. Essentially, all that the stakeholders on Vose Street wanted to know was "when." At this point, I don't really know if "when" is a "knowable" thing. But I am proud to report that, with the assistance of our City Council Member's Field Deputy, Vose Street, originally slated for repairs in 06/07, has moved up the list. I just can't tell you when...

Next, I visited Cohasset Street which offered some disturbing pictures of gang activity present on street signs, signs that had been compromised, a lack of street cleaning, trash from sidewalk vendors, pot holes; All this on a street with a school. Cohasset will take some effort. Petitions must be circulated for street cleaning and street cleaning signs. The school administration must work with the homeowners and start making noise regarding the vendors. We also need to coordinate efforts with police and make sure there is an active Neighborhood Watch program. It will take time, but we've already started.

Finally, on McLennan Avenue, a stakeholder offered sincere concerns about the area. I toured the street myself to take pictures and concluded that -- I want to live there. The streets are nicely surfaced, there are sidewalks, the trees are big and green...so I didn't get any good pictures of bad stuff. It appeared to me that those neighbors are definitely in control of their neighborhood, they know their street --- those are good neighbors to have. But I did see an empty lot that was very overgrown with weeds that appeared to be four to five feet in height in some areas.

And I figured, this should be easy; I'll call the city about getting that empty lot cleared of the big weeds. Piece of cake. So I skipped home and opened up my big West Van Nuys Lake Balboa Neighborhood Council binder that was supplied by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and started combing through the 143-page phone directory of city services. For starters (and for fun), I tried 3-1-1, the new L.A. catch-all number...I listened carefully to the recording and then pressed 1 for English speakers...then I listened to another recording and pressed 2, and then I got disconnected. Just to make sure it wasn't me, I did the same thing a second time and got the same result. Thanks, 311! Then, taking matters into my own fingers, I opened up my big West Van Nuys Lake Balboa Neighborhood Council binder and looked up the number for the Bureau of Engineering for the Valley. Certainly they could clear the lot. Called them and that number was disconnected. So I called the Central District Office for the Bureau to get an answer and...there was no answer...at ten in the morning on a weekday. So then I looked up the Bureau of Engineering for the Harbor. I figured, "it's the Harbor, those guys must be pretty busy." Good call, Neal was home and he gave me the right phone number for the Valley Engineers and I called Melissa – who told me I should call the Los Angeles Fire Department Brush Clearance Unit. I said, "Great! I have the number here in my directory," and I hung up. Oddly enough, the Brush Clearance number in my functional list of citywide services phone directory didn't work either. Undaunted, I went to the LAFD.org site and got the right phone number for brush clearance. I also got the LAFD receptionist who told me that the other number had been disconnected for "about a year now"

Finally, my eye went down to the bottom of the citywide directory page where I noticed the revision date of the phone directory – it said, "As of 5/6/2003."

The receptionist told me to call the local fire station #100 to report the...now what was I talking about...oh yeah, the overgrown fire hazard lot on McLennan...They said they would check out the lot in the afternoon and it should take two to three weeks for the owner to clear it or they will issue a citation. My next action was an email to the Dept. of Neighborhood Empowerment requesting up-to-date directories for the Neighborhood Council.