

Date: March xx, 2023

To: Karen Bass, Mayor of Los Angeles
Ray Regalado, Board of Neighborhood Commissioners President
Hydee Feldstein Soto, City Attorney
Kenneth Mejia, City Controller

Eunisses Hernandez, City Councilmember District 1 and chair of the Neighborhoods and Community Enrichment Committee

CC: Raquel Beltrán, Department of Neighborhood Empowerment General Manager

Re: Hollywood Studio District Neighborhood Council

The Palms Neighborhood Council requests that both the City Attorney and the City Controller immediately open independent investigations into the events described in the document below including under what authority, if any, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and the City Clerk Funding Division spent \$4000 on the Sheriff's Youth Foundation event (to be held on March 25, 2023) on behalf of the HSDNC.

The Palms Neighborhood Council is very concerned about the events leading to the mass resignation of Hollywood Studio District Neighborhood Council board members and their implication for the Neighborhood Council system as a whole. We are equally concerned about the response from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment General Manager.

The Hollywood Studio District NC found itself unable to make quorum on a regular basis and asked for help from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. The Department put the Neighborhood Council under Exhaustive Efforts at the request of the NC. With Exhaustive Efforts, the Department takes much greater control of the Neighborhood Council and works to help the NC to repair its issues. It also allows the NC to operate with a smaller quorum.

At the February 8, 2023 meeting of the HSDNC, Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate Mario Hernandez announced that the NC would sponsor a Sheriff's Youth Foundation event at the \$4000 level, \$4000 being 12.5% of the NC's annual budget, adding that any board member who did not attend the event would be removed from the board. Neither a majority of the NC board members nor the stakeholders present at the meeting were in favor of the expenditure. In fact, a majority of the board members are actively opposed to the event and asked Mr. Hernandez about avenues for appeal. He responded that no appeal was possible; the decision was final. On top of that, the event is not scheduled to occur in the NC's district. In fact, it is not even taking place in the City of Los Angeles. How does this expenditure help achieve the goal of community outreach to find new board members? How does the City Clerk pay this money on behalf of the HSDNC without a Board Action Certification? We know that if our NC voted an expenditure to any organization, even one of our local public schools or our local fire station, the City Clerk would not write the check without a signed BAC.

To address some points raised in the February 18, 2023 letter from Department of Neighborhood Empowerment General Manager, Raquel Beltrán, it is not the responsibility of a Neighborhood Council to promote the Neighborhood Council system at a regional event that is held outside of the City limits and would do little if anything to help the Neighborhood Council recruit new board members and satisfy the reason the board had entered exhaustive efforts.

Any one board member, even a board member who is the chair of a committee, may not speak for the whole board. It is not uncommon for a board to disagree with a committee or even a committee chair and in this case, the board disagreed. It is disingenuous for the Department to use the one member as justification for violating the sentiments of the board. To be clear, the board member cited in the Department's response to the resignation is one of the board members who resigned.

This is not empowering the Neighborhood Council.

In response to this egregious overreach, and choosing to stand for their principles, 9 of the 11 members of the Hollywood Studio District NC board, including 100% of the executive committee, resigned February 15, 2023.

The mission of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is to promote civic engagement and make government more responsive to local needs by supporting the Neighborhood Councils throughout Los Angeles which matches its purpose as set out in Section 901 of the City Charter.

It is hard to see how forcing a Neighborhood Council to sponsor an event its board members and stakeholders oppose satisfies the Department's mission. If this forced participation can happen to Hollywood Studio District, it can happen to any Neighborhood Council.

In a letter to the Neighborhood Council board members on February 18, the General Manager asks why the HSDNC board members did not appeal to the assigned Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate's management. We understand that the NEA told them appeal was not possible so we ask a different question. Why didn't the Department reach out to the resigned board members to see what kind of accommodation would bring them back? The GM says in her letter that the Department "would have liked to have had an opportunity to work with them to resolve the matter." The opportunity still exists. All that is needed is for the Department to avail itself of it.

The letter from the General Manager seems to indicate a hurry to restaff the board. Its efforts should be directed towards restoring the resigned staff and filling the remaining open positions.

The Palms Neighborhood Council seeks the satisfaction of seeing the \$4000 funding restored to HSDNC budget, the resigned board members restored to their positions without being required to support an event in West Hollywood that they oppose, and the Department and BONC work to help the HSDNC thrive. Anything less is an injustice to the people involved, the people who elected them, and to the system as a whole and so we also ask that the Department apologize to the community and the board members involved. Finally, the Palms NC requests that the Department make the recording of the February 8, 2023 HSDNC board meeting available to the public.

The Palms Neighborhood Council finds that we no longer have confidence in the present General Manager of DONE. We request that Mayor Karen Bass and the City Council appoint an acting General Manager of DONE while they search for a permanent replacement. We also request DONE remove Mr. Hernandez for informing the NC board members there was no path for appeal when one did exist.