

WEST HILLS NC NEW MEMBER HANDBOOK

VERSION DATE: JUNE 30, 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

WELCOME to the West Hills Neighborhood Council (WHNC). We hope your experience on the WHNC is both fulfilling and rewarding. As a board member, you will be working with various City agencies and personnel, including elected officials and department heads. We are all part of a team who will work together to make our community a safer and happier place to live, work, learn, pray and play.

This Handbook contains basic information that will help you get started as a contributing board member of the WHNC. Please also read the attached Bylaws, Standing Rules, Code of Civility, Code of Conduct, as well as the Brown Act and Rosenberg's Rules of Order.

2. WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL?

LA's 99 Neighborhood Councils comprise the grassroots level of the Los Angeles City government. The system was established in 1999 by an amendment to the City Charter to connect LA's diverse communities to City Hall. While Neighborhood Council board members are volunteers, they are public officials elected to office by the members of their community.

The PURPOSE of a Neighborhood Council is to advise the city's decision makers on issues of concern to its neighborhood. Under the current rules, NCs may not communicate their positions directly to county, state, or federal legislators and officers, but they may ask their City Council representative to do so.

Each Neighborhood Council is unique, representing the full range of its diverse community. Nevertheless, all 99 of them are held to local, state, and federal standards that other city officials and agencies must observe.

The MISSION of the WHNC is to provide a forum in which West Hills stakeholders can learn about issues that affect the community and express their concerns and ideas; to recommend actions by government officials to address the needs of the West Hills community; to promote communication between stakeholders and government; and to foster pride and participation in addressing the needs of the community.

3. WHAT IS A STAKEHOLDER?

A stakeholder is defined as any individual who:

- 1) Lives, works, or owns real property within the boundaries of the neighborhood council
or
- 2) A "Community Interest Stakeholder," is defined as an individual who is a member of or participates in a community organization within the boundaries of the Neighborhood Council. A "community organization" is an entity that has continuously maintained a physical street address within the boundaries of the Neighborhood Council for not less than one year, and that performs ongoing and verifiable activities and operations that confer some benefit on the community. A for-profit entity does not qualify as a community organization. Examples of community organizations may include Chambers of Commerce, houses of worship or other faith-based organizations, educational institutions or non-profit organizations.

4. WHAT IS THE WHNC BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

The WHNC Board of Directors or “the Board” is the governing body of the WHNC. It consists of 25 Directors (or Board Members) elected by the stakeholders on an “at-large” basis. The Board shall not include more than four Directors who do not live, work, or own property in West Hills.

5. WHAT ARE BOARD MEMBER DUTIES?

The duties of Board Members include advancing the Purpose and Mission of the WHNC by:

- 1) Participating in regularly scheduled Board meetings, with no more than four absences from the previous 12 regular or special meetings of the Board
- 2) Serving actively on at least one committee of the WHNC
- 3) Participating in WHNC actions and events
- 4) Representing the interests of stakeholders before public officials and government agencies
- 5) Encouraging the participation of stakeholders in WHNC activities and events
- 6) Assisting stakeholders in obtaining government services

Suggestion: Attending different committee meetings is a quick way to learn the different areas of focus of our council and how the different committees function and interact.

6. REQUIRED TRAININGS

Board members are required to complete mandatory training sessions. Those trainings are:

- 1) EmpowerLA Code of Conduct (Required to Vote on any Board item)
- 2) Ethics (Required to Vote on any Board item)
- 3) Funding (Required to Vote on any financial matters)

Board members are also required to have a current signed ethics certificate on file with the City.

Other trainings are:

- 1) Project Planning 101 (Required to serve on the Zoning & Planning Committee. Training must be completed within 60 days of joining the Board. Members who fail to complete the training within 60 days will be automatically ineligible to serve on the Committee)
- 2) Financial Officer Training (Required for the treasurer, second signer, alternate signer and bank card holders). This training is currently provided online via a Zoom webinar.
- 3) Anti-Bias Training (being developed)
- 4) Implicit Bias Training
- 5) Gender expression/gender identity (being developed)

Optional trainings and workshops for current NC members are usually shared via direct email to board members or in the NC Monthly Profile Report.

All trainings are available on the Cornerstone platform at the <https://lacity.csod.com/>. All new members will receive a Welcome email with their Cornerstone Credentials and instructions. If a member forgets their login information, email Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.

7. COMMITTEES

The Board shall establish all standing committees and the president shall establish short-term “ad hoc” committees as needed to address specific issues. Suggestions for committees may come from stakeholders or from members of the Board. The President shall appoint the chairs of all committees. Appointments of chairs for standing committees are subject to a majority vote of the Board. A president’s removal of a committee chair can be overruled by a two-thirds vote of the Board.

1) **STANDING COMMITTEES**: WHNC standing committees have “continuing subject matter jurisdiction” and must meet at least nine (9) times per calendar year. Notices for all meetings must be posted at least 72 hours in advance in one public posting place designated by the Neighborhood Council (currently Shadow Ranch Park), posted on the Neighborhood Council website and submitted to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment’s Early Notification System. The standing committees of the WHNC are:

a) **BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE**, which shall, in cooperation with stakeholders, advocate, promote, facilitate and engage in activities to improve and maintain the appearance of West Hills’ streets, sidewalks, parks and other features by encouraging greater participation and responsibility of West Hills stakeholders.

b) **BUDGET COMMITTEE**, which shall be responsible for making recommendations to the Board for all budgetary and financial matters of the WHNC.

c) **COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE**, which shall be responsible for keeping stakeholders aware of WHNC activities, shall promote stakeholder participation and shall interface with other information technology organizations of the city.

d) **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**, which shall be responsible for making recommendations to the Board for protecting the environment.

e) **GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE**, which shall interface with local, state and federal agencies and officials and bring recommendations to the Board to protect and promote the welfare of West Hills and Los Angeles.

f) **HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE**, which shall inform and educate the stakeholders of West Hills on homelessness issues in the West San Fernando Valley, connect those experiencing homelessness to resources, and advocate for the effective use of government resources to contend with the problem of homelessness in the area.

g) **OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**, which shall discuss board agendas and administrative matters pertaining to the WHNC. (This committee is a forum in which Board members share ideas and advise the president, who chairs the meetings. **ALL BOARD MEMBERS SHOULD ATTEND!**)

h) **PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**, which shall be responsible for making recommendations to the Board for protecting and promoting the health of stakeholders.

i) **PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE**, which shall interface with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles Fire Department, hospitals and other agencies on matters relating to the safety of the stakeholders.

j) **SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE**, which shall produce, develop and present unique events to serve and engage the community of West Hills. Moreover, the Special Events Committee, when consulted, will serve as an adjunct advisory committee for other events that might be produced and/or developed by other committees of the West Hills Neighborhood Council.

k) **STREETS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**, which shall interface with and negotiate with the City of Los Angeles, businesses, developers and stakeholders on matters concerning the sidewalks, streets, signage and traffic control measures and devices within West Hills and Los Angeles.

l) **YOUTH AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**, which shall interface with and negotiate with public and private schools, the City of Los Angeles, businesses and developers on matters concerning the education, recreation and general welfare of the youth who reside in or use the facilities located within the boundaries.

m) **ZONING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**, which shall interface with and negotiate with stakeholders, developers, the City of Los Angeles Planning Department and the Planning and Land Use Management Committee of the Los Angeles City Council among others.

2) **AD HOC COMMITTEES**: These committees have a specific purpose and a limited time frame to accomplish its goal. The committee returns its recommendation to the full board for consideration. Ad hoc committees are not subject to Brown Act notice and posting requirements as long as the committee is comprised solely of members of the Board and consists of less than a “quorum of a quorum” of the full Board. In the case of the WHNC, no more than six members may participate in an ad hoc committee while avoiding notice and posting requirements.

Ad hoc committees of the WHNC have included the following, among others:

a) **BYLAWS AD HOC COMMITTEE**, which shall consider and make recommendations to the WHNC Board concerning amendments to the Bylaws and Standing Rules of the WHNC.

b) **ELECTION AD HOC COMMITTEE**, which shall develop the budget and promotional items for upcoming elections.

c) **VACANCY AD HOC COMMITTEE**, which shall meet stakeholders applying to fill vacant seats on the Board, determine their stakeholder status, interview them and submit recommendation(s) to the board when the Board votes on filling the vacant seat(s).

3) **SUB COMMITTEES**: These small committees are formed by and under a standing committee for the purpose of dealing with a specific matter that falls within the scope of that standing committee. Sub committees report directly back to the committee they are under. Sub committees are not subject to Brown Act notice and posting requirements as long as the committee is comprised solely of members of the Board and consists of less than a majority of a minimum quorum of the full Board. In the case of the WHNC, no more than six members may participate in a sub committee while avoiding notice and posting requirements.

4) **WORK GROUPS**: These small groups are similar to sub committees but are less formal and do not have a designated “chair”. They are formed by and under a standing or ad hoc committee for the purpose of working on a specific matter that falls within the scope of that committee. Work groups report directly back to the committee they are under. Work groups must not violate the serial communications prohibitions of the Brown Act.

8. POSTING OF AGENDAS

Meeting agendas for Board and committee meetings must be posted to a 24/7 available physical location and sent to the city by our executive director at least 72 hours prior to a regular meeting and 24 hours prior to a “special” meeting. It must also be posted on the WHNC website.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENTS

Neighborhood Councils play an advisory role in the Los Angeles municipal government. They gather, vet, debate, and come to a consensus on matters that impact City life and policy. A Community Impact Statement (CIS) is an official statement or position adopted by the NC on issues pending before the City Council. CIS's may be seen by various City decision-makers, such as the Mayor, City Council, or City Departments such as City Planning. When a Neighborhood Council submits a CIS on a council file, and the City Council is meeting on that item, a representative of the Neighborhood Council will be allowed to go to the table and speak directly to City Council members for a full five minutes instead of abiding by normal Public Comment rules, which often limit speakers to one or two minutes.

Filing a CIS also preserves our right to speak on the motion any time the file comes back for additional City Council actions. Even if the council has already voted on the issue, a CIS can still have impact, establishing the Neighborhood Council's stance regarding related actions in the future.

10. WHAT IS A REQUEST FOR ACTION?

A Request for Action is submitted to our City Councilmember to request that the City Council take action on a particular matter affecting the community, that is NOT already pending before the City Council. Like CIS, a Request for Action is an official statement or position adopted by the WHNC.

11. WHAT IS THE WHNC CODE OF CIVILITY?

The WHNC Code of Civility was created to ensure that the WHNC's business is conducted in a respectful and courteous manner, and in a way that will generate respect and credibility for the Neighborhood Council. Every board member is required to sign the Code of Civility. (See the attached Code of Civility, Appendix C.)

12. FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE LAWS

Neighborhood Councils abide by laws and policies preventing workplace violence, sexual harassment and discrimination.

13. WHAT IS THE EMPOWER LA CODE OF CONDUCT?

The EmpowerLA Code of Conduct defines how Neighborhood Council Board Members should conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner. It also defines what constitutes "bullying" and "harassment". All Board members are required to renew their Code of Conduct training every two years. (See the attached Code of Conduct, Appendix D.)

14. WHAT IS THE BROWN ACT?

California's Open Meeting Law also known as The Ralph M. Brown Act establishes rules to ensure that actions and deliberations of commissions, boards, councils and other public bodies of local agencies are conducted openly and with public access and input. Neighborhood Council meetings are covered by the Brown Act. As a result, Board and committee members are prohibited from engaging in any communication outside of a public meeting, that leads to a majority of a quorum discussing an action that may be taken. (See the attached Open & Public IV: A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act, Appendix E.)

15. WHAT ARE NEIGHBORHOOD PURPOSE GRANTS (NPG)?

Neighborhood Councils in good fiscal standing, have the ability to grant city funds to 501c(3) nonprofit organizations and public schools in their communities. Such grants may not be issued to houses of worship or private schools. The grant must be for a public purpose that will help the community. For more information, visit EmpowerLA.org.

16. WHAT IS A QUORUM?

A quorum is generally a majority of the total members of a committee or the Board. A quorum must be attained before the committee or the board can discuss issues or take action. The quorum of the Board is fixed at 13 members, which is one more than half of the 25-member Board.

17. HOW ARE VOTES COUNTED?

When voting on a matter, members may vote YES, NO or ABSTAIN. Abstentions are not dealt with the same way by all bodies when determining a majority to pass a motion. Abstentions may be counted as part of the total votes or they may not. For example, if there are 21 Board members present and abstentions are counted as part of that total, 11 YES votes would be required to pass a motion with a majority, regardless of how many abstentions there are. On the other hand, if Abstentions are NOT counted as part of the total, and there are two abstentions, the total number of people taking a YES or NO position becomes 19, and only 10 YES votes are needed for a majority to pass the motion. The WHNC uses the latter method, which means abstentions are not counted at all; only YES or NO votes can decide an outcome.

18. DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN BOARD MEMBERS

If a disagreement occurs between board members and they are unable to work it out between themselves, it is the WHNC protocol for the president and the vice president to meet with the aggrieved Board members to try to work out a resolution.

19. WORKING WITH THE CITY

Neighborhood Councils are primarily advisory bodies to our City Council. The WHNC is located in Council District 12 (CD12) and our current Councilmember is John Lee.

20. CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOR

Your behavior reflects on the entire Board. We are elected community representatives and need to conduct ourselves in a manner becoming public trust. See the Code of Civility at the end of this Handbook.

Harassment, bullying or discrimination based on a protected category, or activity that interferes with the city's goals of maintaining a diverse, equitable, inclusive and productive workplace, is not tolerated. The Office of the City Attorney Labor Relations Division may be asked to investigate questions in this area pertaining to NC boards or board members.

Our meetings require “General Public Comments” on topics NOT on the agenda. Regardless of what is said by the speaker, even when it is untrue, accusatory or insulting, we are not allowed to respond to a General Public Comment. The only exception to this rule is to ask that something be clarified. In most cases, these comments are protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Members ARE allowed to respond to public comments made on agenda items.

21. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN BOARD MEMBERS

There are specific rules regarding communications between board members. A Serial Communication is one that enables a majority of the members of the NC to engage in a communication that should instead occur at a public meeting, and for all practical purposes results in a meeting of the members although the members are not present at a publicly posted and conducted meeting according to the Brown Act. This exists when one member contacts all or a majority of the other board members. A Serial Communication can occur as a series of separate communications that ultimately involves a majority of a quorum of members or more. The concern is that such communications could lead to a concurrence of the majority on an issue that is likely to be considered by the Board. (See attached Brown Act, APPENDIX E.)

22. WHAT IS A CPRA AND HOW DO I RESPOND?

In 1968, the California Legislature enacted the California Public Records Act (CPRA). The Act establishes the public’s right to access information concerning the “people’s business.” Any member of the public can make a Public Records Act request, and all Neighborhood Council members are subject to these requests. Should you receive a Public Records Act request, do NOT respond directly. You must immediately contact the president of the NC and they, working with the City Attorney’s Office, will determine what information is subject to the request and if anything needs to be redacted. The NC president will then respond to the requester. Time is of the essence as CPRA requests must be acknowledged within 10 working days and complied with as soon as possible. ONLY information that concerns the “people’s business” is subject to the CPRA.

23. ROSENBERG’S RULES OF ORDER

“Rosenberg Rules of Order” were created by a retired Superior Court judge after experiencing frustration in using the complex “Robert’s Rules of Order.” The Rosenberg Rules of Order cover the protocols in “Roberts Rules” that best fit the most frequent procedures used in typical governmental decision making. (See attached Rosenberg’s Rules of Order, Appendix F.)

24. Acronyms

BONC:	Board of Neighborhood Commissioners
CIS:	Community Impact Statement
CPRA:	California Public Records Act
DONE:	Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Same as EmpowerLA)
LANCC:	Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Coalition
MER:	Monthly Expenditure Report
NEA:	Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate
NPG:	Neighborhood Purpose Grant
SLO:	Senior Lead Officer
VANC:	Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils