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CITY OF LOS ANGELES

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

RULES, STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES

**ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONERS ON
SEPTEMBER 4, 2012**

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (the “Commission”) has compiled this Rules, Standards, and Best Practices booklet for the purpose of equipping Neighborhood Councils (“NC’s”) throughout the City of Los Angeles to be able to operate more effectively, and to better achieve their missions of being conduits to City government for their neighborhood stakeholders. The booklet achieves this purpose by 1) providing one, easy-to-read summary of all of the rules that all NC’s must follow in the course of their regular operations; and 2) recommending standards and best practices for complying with the rules and more effectively serving the needs of the stakeholders within each NC community.

Therefore, each of the following sections is divided into two parts. The first part summarizes all of the **RULES** relevant to a particular operational issue and provides citations to the laws and regulations from where they came. The second part of each section offers **STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES** and suggestions for best achieving the rules.

The Commission has worked with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (the “Department”) and the Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney to review and summarize all of the **RULES** that govern the regular operations of NC’s from the Los Angeles City Charter, the Los Angeles Administrative Code, the Plan for a System of Neighborhood Councils, and policies adopted by the Commission and the Department. By eliminating the need to research multiple sources of laws and regulations, this booklet offers a more accessible means for finding the universe of relevant rules in one, easy-to-read document. The desired impact is fewer violations of laws and regulations by NC’s through increased awareness of the rules among all NC board members and stakeholders throughout the City.

In establishing the **STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES** for each operating area, the Commission attempted to capture the best practices of individual NC’s from throughout the entire NC system. Through a series of regional meetings open to all NC’s, the Commission has solicited suggestions from NC board members and stakeholders throughout the City for how to most effectively operate the ideal NC. The hope is that these suggested standards will elevate the expectations of NC board members and stakeholders alike, and will challenge each NC to operate on a higher level.

This Rules, Standards and Best Practices booklet is intended to be a “living” document that will be continually revisited and adapted as the rules and standards are amended and elevated. Ultimately, this booklet strives to spur all NC’s to provide a fair, transparent, and inclusive system of neighborhood-level councils for the people of Los Angeles to access and engage their City government.

MEETINGS

Rules:

1. All NC meetings must be open and public, and permit, to the extent feasible, every stakeholder to participate in the conduct of business, deliberation and decision-making. (Charter Sec. 906(a)(6)).
2. NC's must have transparent operations and adopt fair and open procedures for the conduct of business. (Plan Article II, Sec. 3)
3. Each NC must:
 - Meet at least once per quarter
 - Obey the open meeting requirements of the Brown Act, including posting meeting notices in public places, through emails, or the Department's web page
 - Have established procedures to communicate with NC stakeholders on a regular basis, in a manner that ensures information is disseminated throughout, and in a timely manner
 - Have established procedures for the meetings that establish:
 - o # of board members that constitute a majority and a quorum
 - o # of votes by which an NC can take action
 - o the manner in which an action by the NC can be reconsidered

(Admin Code 22.810.1(b)(2)(C)(iv); Plan Art. III, Sec. 2(c)(iii))

4. NC's must follow the requirements below for posting Board and committee meeting agendas:
 - Post the meeting agenda in 5 to 7 physical locations that adhere to the Brown Act's requirements regarding the accessibility of the posting site and the time line for posting agendas
 - If an NC has a website or stakeholder email database, post and send out agendas through these channels
 - Submit a copy of an agenda for a regular or special meeting to the Department
 - Inform the Department of the physical posting sites, website and stakeholder database for approval by the Department.

(Commission Policy #: 2010-02)

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rules:

- NC's should ensure that all NC Board Members are trained and familiar with the requirements of the Brown Act.
- NC's should have a copy of a Brown Act pamphlet available to reference during NC Board Meetings.

- NC's should adopt parliamentary procedures such as Robert's Rules of Order or Rosenberg's Rules of Order to guide the conduct all meetings.
- NC's should ensure all of the required procedures have been adopted and copies of the procedures are readily available to NC Board Members and the public.
- NC's should document all of the outreach procedures used to publicize Board meetings.
- NC's should attempt to identify and quantify the stakeholders that are reached through each of the outreach methods.
- NC's should choose physical locations that are most effective for reaching the most diverse interest and stakeholder groups in the NC region.
- NC's should develop and regularly maintain a website and stakeholder email database.

COMMUNICATIONS

Rule:

1. NC's must establish procedures for communicating with all NC community stakeholders on a regular basis in a manner ensuring that information is disseminated evenly and in a timely manner. (Charter Sec. 906(a)(4); Plan Art. III, Sec. 2(c)(iii)(3))

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rule:

- NC's should communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis (at least four times per year).
- NC communications should reach the largest number of stakeholders possible. Special attention should be paid to groups and areas that are typically underserved by traditional media.
- NC's should use a variety of communication methods to notify and update stakeholders, including direct and indirect media; electronic (email, web and social media), published (newsletter and fliers); outdoor (banners); and print and broadcast media (news releases).
- NC's should provide communication content that is relevant, providing stakeholders with facts about issues of concern and possible action by city government.
- NC communications should occur in a timely manner, allowing stakeholders enough time to learn about issues provide feedback to the neighborhood council.

FINANCE

Rules:

1. NC's must have a system of financial accountability that governs its use of funds. (Charter Sec. 906(a)(5))
2. Each NC must:
 - Prescribe a method for keeping a book of accounts that complies with applicable local, state, and federal laws
 - Discuss its finances at a regularly scheduled or special meeting, prior to submitting an account statement to the Department in order to gather input from its community stakeholders
 - Ensure that its book of accounts are open to all community stakeholders
 - Establish a process by which its members can review its book of account
 - Ensure that a Treasurer is appointed or elected at all times who will maintain its book or accounts and submit account statements to the Department

(Plan Art. III, Sec. 2(d))

3. The Department's funding policies require all NC's to:
 - Adopt an annual budget that conforms to the Department rules.
 - Report regularly on its finances at board meetings.
 - Remain current with quarterly audits.
 - Comply with rules and regulations promulgated by the Department and other relevant city departments.
 - Appoint a budget and finance committee that meets regularly.

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rules:

- NC's should ensure that at least two members of the NC Board (Treasurer and one other Board Member) have received training from the Department on accounting and financial management
- NC's should appoint or elect individuals who have accounting or financial management experience to the Treasurer position

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Rule:

1. NC's must acknowledge and agree that they will abide by any applicable provisions of the City's Governmental Ethics Ordinance, as set forth in Los Angeles Municipal Code, as well as all applicable federal state and local government. (Admin Code 22.810.1(b)(2)(E))

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rule:

- NC's should maintain current records to confirm that all NC Board Members have fulfilled their regular ethics training requirements.
- NC's should implement rules whereby NC Board Members who do not fulfill their mandatory training requirements within a certain time period are either barred from participating in certain Board matters such as financial or land use matters, or face other appropriate consequences.

ELECTIONS

Rules:

1. NC's have control over allocating board member seats, determining the voting rights of different categories of stakeholders, and establishing other voting procedures that are consistent with laws and City procedures. (Plan Art. V, Sec. 2)
2. NC's cannot adopt board structures or voting systems that limit broad participation by community stakeholders. NC's must make elections open to all stakeholders (Plan Art. V, Sec. 2)

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rules:

- NC's are free to allocate governing board seats so long as no one stakeholder category holds a majority of seats.
- NC's are free to determine which members of the board stakeholders may vote for and which seats they may be elected to.
- NC's should have procedures that are transparent and easy to understand without the need for a great deal of interpretation.
- NC election procedures should have some method for resolving challenges
- Elections should be the opportunity for participation by as diverse a slate of candidates as possible.
- Elections should be conducted in such a way as to encourage participation by all stakeholders.

- In order to effectuate the prior two standards NC's should explore ways to diversify the election experience (eg – Vote by Mail; I-Net voting; Town hall; Multiple balloting days; Multiple balloting locations)
- To effectuate all of the above NCs should engage in effective outreach aided by those City agencies that have the ability to do so

BYLAWS

Rules:

1. NC's must adopt fair and open procedures for the conduct of their business. (Charter Sec. 904(g))
2. At a minimum, NC bylaws must provide for:
 - The method by which their officers are chosen
 - NC membership to be open to everyone who lives, works or owns property in the area (stakeholders)
 - Assurances that the members of the NC will reflect the diverse interests within their area
 - A system through which the NC will communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis;
 - A system for financial accountability of NC funds
 - Guarantees that all meetings will be open and public, and permit, to the extent feasible, every stakeholder to participate in the conduct of business, deliberation and decision-making

(Charter Sec. 906(a))

3. NC bylaws must also include the following:
 - NC name
 - Definitions of stakeholders and governing body members
 - Meeting procedures that reflect the requirements of the Meetings section above
 - Grievance procedures

(Plan Art. III, Sec. 2(c))

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rules:

- NC's should adopt the wireframe as developed by the Bylaws Task Force and approved by the Commission for organizing bylaws content and language.
- NC bylaws should cover those subjects that are expected to remain unchanged over time (e.g. – officers; standing committees or the method by which committees may be formed; meetings; terms of governing board members and officers; duties of officers; etc).

- For those subjects that may be expected to change, be revised or be updated over time, bylaws should contain broad language and concepts (e.g. – posting locations; meeting locations; specific ethical standards not covered by law or other official rules; board member duties and authorities, etc).
- NC's should also use the following guidelines to adopt governing rules:
 - o Rules should govern specific subjects that may be expected to change, be revised or be updated over time or on a frequent basis.
 - o Rules should govern subjects that the NC board may, for matters of convenience or expediency suspend, giving it the ability to act where it otherwise might have to delay action or take an action that is unfair to board members or stakeholders.
 - o Rules should, where permitted, be used to expand upon and, if necessary clarify the bylaws
 - o Rules should not be used to punish or exclude certain classes of, or specific, board members or stakeholders
 - o Rules should be subject to approval by the entire board

INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY

Rules:

1. NC's must reflect the diverse interests within their area and is inclusive and open to all community stakeholders. (Charter Sec. 906(a)(3); Plan Art. II Sec. 1)
2. No single community stakeholder group may comprise a majority of the members of the NC. Stakeholder groups are individuals who: a) live, b) work, c) own property, or d) declares a stake in the NC and affirms a factual basis for it. (Plan Art III, Sec. 2(c)(ii)(2)(a)); Plan Art. II, Sec. 1)

Standards and Best Practices for Following the Rules:

- NC board members should reflect, and be representative of, a wide variety of categories of groups within their NC boundaries, including but not limited to:
 - o Neighborhoods
 - o Ethnicities
 - o Race
 - o Gender
 - o Age
 - o Homeowners and renters, and
 - o Sexual orientation
- NC's should focus their external communication efforts to reach all of the above groups for elections and participation at Board meetings and special events.