



Venice Neighborhood Council



LUPC APPLICATION

Contact Information:

Qualifying Stakeholder Address (*Direcci6n*):

Print Name/ <i>Nombre en letra de Mo/de</i> : Robert Aronson			
Street address / <i>Direcci6n</i>	Venice City / <i>Ciudad</i>	CA State / <i>Estado</i>	90291 Zip/ <i>Codigo Postal</i>

Mailing Address (if different):

Street address / <i>Direccion</i>	City / <i>Ciudad</i>	State / <i>Estado</i>	Zip/ <i>Codigo Postal</i>
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Contact Numbers:

Phone (Day) / <i>Telefono (d/a)</i>	Phone (Evening) / <i>Telefono (tarde)</i>	Fax Number
R_Aronson@UReach.com Email / <i>Correo Electronico</i> (very important)		

I hereby certify, that I wish to serve on the Land Use and Planning Committee of the Venice Neighborhood Council and I am a Stakeholder within the boundaries of the VNC area.

Stakeholder Signature/Firma _____ Date: December 10, 2012

Note: Stakeholders that did not registered as a VNC Stakeholder in one of the last two elections should register with the Secretary of the VNC at the December 18, 2012 Board of Officers Meeting. Please bring proof of stakeholder status with you to register.

Answers To Questions:

1. Please explain why you wish to serve on the LUPC.
 - a. Have you served before on the LUPC or other planning and land use related committee? If so, please provide some detail.
 - b. Please state any qualifications or related experiences relevant to this position.

My skills, diligence, and judgment will contribute to farsighted planning, better projects, and managed growth. I have been on the LUPC since it became an elected body, in December, 2007. In August, 1993, I was appointed by Councilwoman Galanter to the Venice Community Planning Advisory Committee ("CPAC"), where I served for 8½ years, until the CPAC was disbanded in 2002. I was appointed to the CPAC because I was involved in the Venice Local Coastal Program ("LCP") process in the early 1990's, and the Councilmember's staff recognized my interest and expertise, particularly my ability to understand and to explain laws and regulations. The CPAC was created by Councilwoman Galanter to perform the same advisory function that the LUPC now performs as part of the Venice Neighborhood Council. Some of the members of the CPAC also served with me on the LUPC.

I have been a practicing business and real estate litigator for over 25 years in Los Angeles. For several years in the late 1980's and early 1990's, I was a real estate developer, bringing the first apartment building recycling program to the City of Los Angeles, in over 100 apartment buildings. I am experienced in statutory interpretation, including the Planning and Zoning Codes, and I have a decent familiarity with the planning process

While serving on both the LUPC and the CPAC, I took my responsibilities seriously, visiting nearly every site on the Agenda prior to the public hearing. I strongly encourage involvement of the neighbors and the community because I have a deep conviction that constructive neighborhood involvement always yields a better project. I have a good sense of when someone is being obstructionist and unreasonable, and I still look for any useful contributions despite the vitriol. I am open-minded yet decisive, and I am comfortable with being in the minority if I believe in the merits of my position. When I am the LUPC staff person assigned to the project, I work with the applicant to provide the information needed by the community to have meaningful input. Where appropriate, I become involved in mediating between opposing parties in my capacity as the staff person, and seek to find common ground and narrow the differences.

Professional Qualifications:

Business and real estate litigation lawyer, 1986 to present;

Member, Venice Neighborhood Council Land Use And Planning Committee, December, 2007, to present;

Los Angeles Superior Court Temporary Judge, hearing Small Claims and Traffic matters, 2003-2012

Member, Venice Community Planning Advisory Committee, August, 1993, through May, 2002;

Founder, North Village Recycling Project, the first apartment building recycling project in the City of Los Angeles, serving over 100 apartment buildings, used as a model project in “Recycling In Multi-Family Buildings,” a guide prepared by the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Integrated Solid Waste Management, 1990-1992;

Vice President, North Village Co., developer of residential apartment and condominium projects and commercial projects, 1989-1992;

Other Community Involvement:

I have volunteered to work on the election campaigns for Ruth Galanter, Deborah Bowen, Jane Harman, and Nick Karno, in addition to some state and national offices, by walking door-to-door in my precinct and providing information to my neighbors, and encouraging them to vote.

I was appointed by Councilman Rosendahl to serve as one of three members of the Channel Gateway Trust Fund Advisory Committee from May, 2008, through February, 2009. The other two members were Sheila Bernard and Dennis Hathaway. The “Channel Gateway Venice Affordable Housing Off Site and Community Involvement Trust Fund” was established in 2000 as a condition of approval of the Channel Gateway development at the intersection of Lincoln Boulevard and Maxella Avenue, which now includes a Ralphs supermarket and three condominium towers on Marina Pointe Drive. The funds totaled \$1.1 million and were required to be expended solely within the Venice Community Plan Area. Councilman Rosendahl established this committee to publicize the availability of these funds; to solicit and encourage creative input for the use of these funds from the community, from affordable housing experts, and beyond; to gather information; to seek specific written requests for grants of these funds from non-profit organizations; and to prepare a final report making recommendations to Councilman Rosendahl for the disbursement of these funds.

I was a member of the Elections Committee of the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council in 2002, for the very first election of the Board of Officers. On election day, I worked in conjunction with the League of Women Voters to supervise election issues and questions (since I was the only person not running for office), and I organized and prepared the food for the election event.

2. Please list the two most pressing planning and land use issues you feel are facing the Venice Community today. What would you like to see done in order to solve, manage, or improve these issues?

First, the relationship between public transportation, traffic, parking, housing density, and open space. These issues are so interrelated that they are one. Venice currently has no proposed stops on any of the planned rail lines being built in the County of Los Angeles. Venice is a major tourist destination, and this is pathetic. Venice needs to mobilize to become part of the rail system, connecting to the Expo Line, the Red Line down Wilshire Boulevard, and/or the Green Line on Lincoln to LAX. It has long been my opinion that we don’t have a traffic problem or a parking problem in Los Angeles, so much as we have a public transportation problem.

Even with excellent public transportation, it seems that the battle between growth (both residential and commercial) and parking will go on. Spending huge amounts of money on building places for parking cars seems like a misplaced priority when there are so many other unmet needs in society. Venice can't even begin to ponder this dilemma because there is no land for building parking structures. The solution is elusive and multi-faceted. Vastly improved public transportation is required. Another element of the solution is to encourage bicycling, by providing bike checks at the beach on summer weekend days and at events, and installing more bike racks. Hiring local and requiring transportation demand management plans from businesses also contributes to less traffic and lower parking demand.

The second most pressing planning and land use issue is enforcement of conditions of approval. Sadly, where the City approves a new use of property and imposes conditions to which the applicant promises to adhere, it is common for the applicant to commence the use and egregiously violate the conditions of approval. If neighbors are adversely affected by a violation of conditions of approval, and it interferes with their reasonable expectations (such as noise or parking), and it takes months or years of battling with the violator, and they do not get the support of the City, it takes a toll on the lives of the neighbors. If the City is unable or unwilling to enforce conditions of approval, there is little point in having them. If the City takes months or years to enforce obvious violations of conditions of approval, it is unfair to the adjacent residents.

The City often claims they don't have the resources to enforce conditions of approval, but a violation of conditions of approval is a misdemeanor, and the fines would certainly cover the expense. While it may seem like there are other, more important, enforcement priorities in the big City, the affected neighbors would not agree. Currently, the Planning Department imposes the conditions when approving an application for a new property use, but the Planning Department has no enforcement division. The conditions of approval are enforced by the Department of Building and Safety. This is not working.

One enforcement mechanism we have tried is requiring a Plan Approval process to take place a set number of months after the applicant begins the permitted use. A Plan Approval requires the applicant to list all of the conditions of approval and state whether they are in compliance with them, and provide back-up evidence to support their position. The City holds a public hearing and gathers input from the community and decides whether the conditions of approval need to be tightened up to stop any violations. This is an expensive process, so if the applicant is unquestionably in compliance, it is a waste of everyone's resources to conduct a Plan Approval. On the other hand, if the applicant is violating the conditions of approval from the inception, the neighbors have to suffer for over a year until the Plan Approval process is completed. A suggested middle ground is for the Plan Approval process to be triggered as soon as the applicant has shown an intent to continuously violate the conditions of approval. This would allow the process to happen sooner if there are problems, and never if there are no problems. The devil is in the details, and it will be interesting to see if the City Planning is willing to try this.

A third pressing land use and planning issue is affordable housing. Over the decades, Venice has gone from somewhat trashy to somewhat trendy. In the last few years, rents and property values have skyrocketed, and affordable housing is now nearly non-existent. One of the primary attributes of Venice has been diversity, and the lack of affordable housing will bring an end to the socioeconomic aspect of the diversity we enjoyed. Another result of the loss of affordable housing is that people who work in Venice can't afford to live where they work, which increases

traffic. Perhaps this is the inevitable result of gentrification. The available solutions to the loss of affordable housing seem to make only a small dent in the problem. The Mello Act is one of these small solutions, but last month the City granted an exception and allowed Mello Act affordable units which were required for a Venice condominium development, to be built outside of Venice, which I consider a betrayal of our community.

Another problem is illegally-tall fences and hedges. Residents maintain tall fences and hedges in their front yard area, resulting in our streets becoming a corridor of fortresses and compounds, walling off the community, blocking light and air, shutting out the world, and diminishing open space. The police consider tall fences and hedges a safety hazard, where criminals can hide. There are walk streets that are open and magnificent, and there are walk streets that are dark, depressing corridors of tall walls and impenetrable hedges.

Finally, we need to start incorporating electric vehicle charging infrastructure into residential and commercial projects.

3. Under what kinds of situations do you feel it to be appropriate to grant exceptions or variances to the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan or other LA City Planning codes?

Some say that all new development projects must comply with the VCZSP, and that no exceptions or variances should be granted. If that were the case, there would be no need for the LUPC, or for much of the City Planning Department. Nearly every project that comes before the LUPC is there because the applicant is claiming that there is a hardship involved in complying with the VCZSP, and that either the benefit to the community outweighs compliance, or that the lack of compliance is trivial and compliance should be excused. Some applicants are requesting an interpretation of the VCZSP or the Planning and Zoning Code, and some applicants are seeking discretionary permits such as to sell or serve alcohol.

Certain findings are required to grant exceptions and variances. Many “findings” are counterintuitive and only pay lip service to the requirement of findings. It comes down to one’s vision and judgment, and whether the proposed project meets the spirit and intent of the VCZSP and the Planning and Zoning Code, and whether the proposed project satisfies the needs and desires of the community.

Where the VCZSP and the Planning and Zoning Code have failed to keep up with forward-thinking urban planning, and they do not provide for new solutions to difficult problems, exceptions and variances allow us to experiment with new solutions.

4. Please review the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan and the Venice Land Use Plan (which was certified by the California Coastal Commission) and comment briefly on both your knowledge of and your opinion of each.

The Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan (“VCZSP”) needs to be revised to address at least a dozen ambiguities, and to anticipate future land use issues. The City claims they don’t have the money to revise it. If the VNC can agree on which provisions need to be changed, and draft

language to effectuate the change, we can submit a ready-to-go ordinance to the City and demand that it be reviewed by the City Attorney and presented to the City Council for a vote.

The Planning Department has made a Director's Interpretation ("DIR") of the Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance which unquestionably violates the intent and the spirit of the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan. This DIR allows someone to build more units on a property than would be allowed under the VCZSP by claiming that units are not units, they are units on separate lots. This DIR contradicts the Planning Department's own guidelines, which state that the total number of subdivided lots should not exceed the number of units allowed by a Specific Plan. The DIR states that the City is going to allow increased density in direct contradiction of our Specific Plan. This is outrageous. The DIR needs to be revoked.

If the City is unresponsive to our local needs, perhaps we need to bring the government closer to home, as Venice finally has the tax base to become an independent city again.