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Government

Packed City Council Meeting Addresses Budget, Affordable Housing

The panel votes on the city budget, developers for Parcel B, a Habitat for Humanity project and the summer schedule for buses going to West LA College.

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The City Council took action on a wide variety of issues, many of which involved significant input from the community, in an extended meeting Monday night that ran more than five hours.

After a short public hearing, the council adopted a [budget](#) for fiscal year 2011-12, which begins July 1, returning a Fire Department training officer position that had been previously cut and directing city staff to find alternative funding for the Police Department's Juvenile Diversion Program. The program, which helps keep young offenders from getting involved in more serious crimes, had been cut as part of the overall 2 percent reduction that City Manager John Nachbar had asked all city departments to make.

The budget still includes a \$2.8 million deficit, which will be closed using city reserves.

"When you believe something is so important, you go to your savings," Mayor Micheal O'Leary said about using city reserves for the gap, rather than laying off city staff members and reducing services.

In other City Council news, as the next step in the ongoing process to develop the vacant lot at 9300 Culver Boulevard—also known as Parcel B—the councilmen received a report from the Redevelopment Agency staff on the Request for Qualifications process that began in February. The staff had selected three potential developers as being the most qualified to submit proposals: the Tolkin Group, Combined Properties/Hudson Pacific and Macerich.

However, the council requested that Cardiff Realty and the Runyan Group also be added to the group that will be sent a Request for Proposals, essentially allowing five developers to compete for the project.

"I think it's important that we have a developer that believes in the city," Councilman Andrew Weissman said during the discussion, in which he advocated for the inclusion of Cardiff Realty.

Vice Mayor Scott Malsin said that he preferred to include only the top three developers in the RFP process, but later voted with the rest of the council to include all five developers.

Almost as contentious as the ongoing [Parcel B](#) process was the discussion regarding an affordable housing project on the lot at 4044-4068 Globe Ave. The council was asked to approve entering into an exclusive negotiation with Habitat for Humanity to develop the lots into six duplexes, creating 12 units of affordable housing.

Several residents on the affected block protested the project itself, claiming that it would add to the significant problems the residents face with traffic and parking.

"We had a wonderful neighborhood," said Charles Harris, who has lived on the street for many years. "It seems to me your proposals would only add to these

problems."

He was countered by numerous comments from representatives of Habitat for Humanity, which builds and sells homes to low- and moderate-income families. The families also contribute 500 hours of "sweat-equity" in the building of their homes, as do other community members, including Lynwood Mayor Aida Castro.

"This is an awesome opportunity for your community," Castro told the council after sharing how Habitat for Humanity had placed 22 families in her city into homes and the positive effects that had on her Lynwood.

Agreeing that Globe Avenue residents' concerns about parking and traffic needed to be addressed, the council voted to begin negotiations with Habitat, as well as directed redevelopment staffers to look into mitigating the parking issue.

"We will make the adjustments to make it work," O'Leary said. "I couldn't be more excited than to have Habitat for Humanity working with us. If this moves forward, I'm going to buy a hammer. I will make sure that the residents are listened to. I'm sorry if it feels like we haven't."

Nonetheless, the most contentious issue of the evening was the proposed summer schedule for [Culver City buses stopping at West Los Angeles College](#). At the heart of the matter is the bus stop, up the hill from the corner of Jefferson and Overland, in the heart of the campus.

Area residents oppose the bus stop, saying that noise from the buses is extremely loud and a nuisance. Students and college officials say the stop is necessary so that students can get to class in a timely manner and for those students who have disabilities and can't climb the hill.

O'Leary and Malsin both said repeatedly that the council is not going to eliminate the service to the college, but it did want to reduce the hours during the summer when the college is not offering classes, and to maintain the reduced schedule voted on in the spring in response to residents' complaints.

"The folks here are entitled to a quiet home," Malsin said. "We're trying to provide an adequate level of service."

The council voted for the reduced hours over the summer, with buses making the stop Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. until Aug. 8, when the five-day-per-week service will resume.

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