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## **Playa del Rey Neighbors hear Planning Commission head about getting involved early in local issues**

BY HELGA GENDELL

If residents are concerned about proposed new developments in their community, they need to get involved early in the process because by the time the notice for a hearing has been sent out, it's too late to have an impact, said Jane Usher, president of the Los Angeles City Planning Commission, at a meeting Wednesday, August 6th, of the Playa del Rey Neighbors at the Del Rey Church in Playa del Rey.

If residents wait until a hearing to speak against a project, they're bound to be disappointed when they get two minutes at the microphone to voice their opposition, she said.

"The most important person in the land use decision process is your City Council member," Usher said.

Usher said that the Community Plan is the "constitution" for land use. Los Angeles has 35 Community Plans and in other cities, Community Plans would be sacrosanct, but in Los Angeles they have been disrespected.

Community Plans are being rewritten to be intensely specific, with very little left to guess because, up to now, they have been very generic and you can find whatever you want in them, said Usher.

Tools to aid individuals in learning about new developments, where they are being built and by whom, are available on the City of Los Angeles Web site.

The Early Notification System (ENS) offers e-mail notification of a variety of city department and commission actions.

To gain access to ENS, log onto [lacity.org](http://lacity.org) and click on "ENS" on the left under "Quick Links."

The second tool is ZIMAS (Zone Information & Map Access System), which provides information either by address, tax assessor parcel number, case number or legal description. This is at <http://zimas.lacity.org>

"If you think a project is happening on the 'QT', utilize the ZIMAS site to find out information about the project, ask your councilmember to find out who the [city] planner is on the project and sit with the councilmember and brainstorm," said Usher.

Individuals can also go to the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety and ask to see permits issued for developments, said Usher, telling the audience to "work with your city councilmember right away when new projects come up, and get his or her assistance."

There is a hierarchy of zoning, from the least intensive use to the most intensive, and the most intensive zone permits all uses of the least intensive zoning, she said.

Residential development used to be the "cash cow," not commercial, but the pendulum has swung and the "love affair with residential development" is abating, Usher said.

Working with the councilmember on writing an Interim Control Ordinance (ICO) is also an option for dealing with problems that persist with development, said Usher, citing as an example: defining an area, looking at the map, then writing design standards and saying "this is what the community has to have."

Los Angeles has a history of each councilmember having final say on what goes on in his or her district, and the local councilmember takes the lead when these projects are taken to the full City Council and the other council members typically defer to that councilmember, she said.

Usher also recommended that Neighborhood Councils "cross-pollinate" by building bridges with one another on various issues and raise a collective voice.

The only player that trumps the City of Los Angeles is all of the school districts because they have their own land use authority, she said.

Community members need to know how to participate in the process so that "it's something you do, not something that is done to you," Usher said.

There are common misconceptions about the process and how you affect it, and "they will wring you out and string you out and wither you on the vine," said Usher.

Collaboration between the community, the applicant/developer, the Neighborhood Council and the city councilmember is essential to the process, said Usher.

One speaker brought up the cut-through traffic from southern beach cities through Playa del Rey, and said residents want parking on Culver Boulevard and a stop to the cut-through traffic.

Usher recommended making a priorities list, and said that parking is a "double-edge sword, with some people wanting more parking and others saying there are too many parking lots."

She suggested contacting the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation to see if angle parking would work or whether the use of speed bumps and humps was an option.

In the Eagle Rock area of Los Angeles, Usher said business owners along Eagle Rock Boulevard are partnering in collective parking by utilizing valets to park cars after a study showed that there was sufficient parking, though not always immediately in front of the local businesses customers frequented.

Another speaker said that Playa del Rey is always being "lumped in" with Westchester, but that there are specific issues in Playa del Rey and that the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa del Rey has not taken any action.

Usher said she is hopeful that Neighborhood Councils will become "an incredibly strong voice" and that they have the potential "to become a legitimate voice."

"I like to ask Neighborhood Council leaders what their stakeholders think, and I don't want to undercut Neighborhood Councils," said Usher.

On the issue of infrastructure planning, Usher said Community Plans didn't provide for infrastructure growth, but the new plans will "have a meaty chapter on infrastructures, which will be a first for the City of Los Angeles."

Asked if infrastructure included water, Usher said that it does, and told the audience that until three months ago, the Department of Water and Power advised applicants in a letter that there was plenty of water, but it no longer does so.

Usher's message was to "rally the troops and be ready" when it comes to early awareness of new development.