

## **Council Member Column for Neighborhood Newsletters**

*Spring 2000*

### *Neighborhood Revitalization Program Phase II*

On February 28, 2000, the NRP Policy Board voted to appropriate dedicated NRP funds for certain “citywide priorities.” During the debate before the Board, one Board member wondered if citizens would perceive this action as a “bait-and switch.” Here is the story. You be the judge.

NRP volunteers have always recognized that we had to spend 52.5% of the NRP funds on housing and housing related activities. This is part of the statute creating NRP. However, this requirement came with two caveats. First, the requirement would be satisfied on a city-wide basis. Second, it would be satisfied by the end of the twenty-year program period. There was no demand that other “citywide goals” be served. However, as pressure to enhance city public spending increased, policy makers targeted NRP as a potential funding source.

The specter of redirecting NRP funds to other City projects has been abroad for almost a year. The issue was first raised, at least by implication, at the City’s Phase II Community Meeting in April, 1999. In the Fall of 1999, NRP was noted as one of the prime sources for funding the City’s affordable housing initiatives. Having been elected in the interim, I objected to simply co-opting NRP money without, at least, honoring the Phase II process. I insisted on language in the affordable housing resolution which maintained the integrity of that process. It seemed to me that if affordable housing -- which is a real problem -- was a new city priority, the city needed to reallocate its existing resources to reflect this policy decision, not to simply reach into another program for additional resources.

Of course, the city budget process resulted in a tax increase, little substantive spending cuts, and a commitment of millions of dollars for affordable housing. NRP remained a target to relieve this budget pressure.

On February 8, 2000, the Policy Board presented five options for NRP Phase II to the neighborhoods at Whittier Park. Two of these options set aside between 25 and 60% of the Phase II funds for city priorities – now, not only for affordable housing but “commercial corridor” development as well. In reviewing the comments from that and the subsequent sector meetings, participants overwhelmingly rejected these set-aside programs and asked that the Policy Board either leave the program as it is or hold back some amount to make sure that the 52.5% housing requirement is met. The people spoke loudly and clearly.

However, on February 28, 2000, the Policy Board rejected the people’s advice. Rather than work with the five options presented to the neighborhoods, the Policy Board considered and adopted two new options. While different in their complexity and approach, the “New Options” had one thing in common --

the very concept that had been rejected by the neighborhoods -- a set aside for "citywide priorities."

Lest there be any confusion, the Board made it clear that the "New Options" are entirely new. Protection Neighborhood Representative Nick Kakos moved that the "New Options" be set aside and that options endorsed by the neighborhood meetings be sent back to staff for further development. That motion was defeated. Whatever the New Options are, they are not something which the neighborhoods have seen before.

The debate about whether NRP funds will be co-opted for "citywide priorities" is effectively over. I'm disappointed with the Board's action. Policy makers are not bound by popular sentiment, however clearly stated. Nevertheless, I think it is incumbent on those who would break with such a mandate to state their reasons explicitly and persuasively. Lacking this, it appears to be a real breach of faith with the many people who have contributed their sweat equity to NRP. One hard-working volunteer asked me, "Why should I bother to go to these meetings anymore if they don't seem to listen?" Why, indeed. Nevertheless, if NRP is to remain an effective alternative to city government-as-usual, it is up to us -- all of us -- to let our policy makers know that we are watching and will hold them accountable for their decisions.