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Clarification on Neighborhood Council Meetings

Neighborhood Councils recently asked questions relating to the circumstances under which Neighborhood Council Boards may hold community meetings, as well as questions about the circumstances under which a Neighborhood Council Board members may attend a training or community meeting without violating the open meeting requirements in the Brown Act. Because the City Attorney's Office and Department of Neighborhood Empowerment are dedicated to assisting Neighborhood Council's fulfill their goals and objectives, this handout is designed to assist you in determining which meetings and community events are not subject to the Brown Act. Many meetings and community events do not trigger the Brown Act. Primarily, the focus of the Brown Act is ensuring that a majority of a Neighborhood Council board or committee does not hold a private meeting to discuss board/committee business outside the public view.

The following are examples of allowable meetings and events:

Option 1: Holding a private meeting to discuss neighborhood council business with less than the board's or committee's majority required for taking action. For example having a private meeting with your City Council representative, a meeting between limited board/committee members on the same board, or a meeting with limited members from another Neighborhood Council. Since the bylaws vary for different Neighborhood Councils, please feel free to contact our Office so that we may explain how to calculate the number that are allowed to meet.

As long as the private meeting does not exceed the least number of people required to act on behalf of the board or committee, the meeting is not subject to the Brown Act, does not need to be open to the public and no notice or agenda is required.

Option 2: Holding a public meeting following all of the Brown Act rules (including agendas and public input) where everyone attends and discusses board business, such as your Neighborhood Council meetings or a joint meeting with another Neighborhood Council or another community group.

To hold a joint meeting with another Neighborhood Council board or committee and discuss board or committee business, the Brown Act requires that the meeting be noticed as a joint meeting of both bodies subject to the Brown Act. To hold a joint meeting with a private community group, the Brown Act simply requires that the joint meeting be noticed as a meeting of the Neighborhood Council with an agenda disclosing that a private community group will be invited to participate. If you are having

trouble creating an agenda for a joint meeting, please contact the Department or our Office for assistance. Once the agenda is finalized, the Department will officially post it at City Hall and on the Early Notification System.

Option 3: Hosting a social event/party where no business will be discussed, such as holiday parties.

All Neighborhood Council Board and committee members may attend social events with each other provided that board/committee members do not engage in a discussion regarding board/committee business with the board's/committee's majority required for taking action. The Brown Act does not require notice of social events be posted or be open to the public if no public funds are used to conduct the event.

Option 4: Attending a conference or training with other board members, such as City trainings or the Congress of Neighborhood workshops.

If a conference, training or similar gathering is open to the public and involves issues of general interest to the public, everyone may attend as long as the board's majority does not discuss among each other their board business while in attendance. All board and committee members may attend these types of conferences and trainings. The Brown Act does not require conferences and trainings to be noticed unless the training with board members is during one of your board meetings or at your board retreat.

Additional exceptions exist for holding meetings. The purpose of this announcement is not necessarily to be comprehensive, but to clarify any misunderstandings that may impede the lawful and vigorous functioning of Neighborhood Councils. As always, please contact our Office or the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment if you have any questions or concerns.

The regional advisor for Neighborhood Councils in the South, Central, Harbor and West areas of the City is Deputy City Attorney Carmen Hawkins: carmen.hawkins@lacity.org.

The regional advisor for Neighborhood Councils in the North Valley, South Valley and East areas of the City is Deputy City Attorney Alois Phillips: alois.phillips@lacity.org.

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