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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

PRESENTATION BY
Ms Carrie Sutkin, Field Director for Supervisor Molina
First District, Los Angeles County
Topic: The Status of the First District

October 4, 2001

Chairman Philibosian introduced the First District Field Director, Carrie Sutkin who has worked with Supervisor Molina for eleven years and oversees fourteen employees in two field offices. From 1990-1995, she was a Planning Deputy and a Health Deputy for Supervisor Molina and is familiar with the Blue Ribbon Task Force Panel. Presently, she is working on her PhD.

Ms. Sutkin began by stating that a Field Director not only needs census statistics, but is also involved in contacting and advocating for the residents of the district.

Ms. Sutkin said that the First District census had an adjustment for unincorporated areas: in 1990, there were 1.7M and in 2000, +/- 1.9M. There are 22 unincorporated areas in the First District, which comprises 83% of the population and is the largest unincorporated population of any supervisorial district (over 320,000 residents). (The First District is trying to come up with a new definition for the word "unincorporated", such as "communities" or "areas". There are plans to construct a "City Hall" in East Los Angeles so the people will not feel "unincorporated".)

Ms. Sutkin felt that the unincorporated area was an antiquated governance system. Part of the complexity was a lack of common names and good census collecting. The third largest unincorporated area in the country is East Los Angeles. In 1990 according to the United States Census there were 129,000 people; in 2000 the numbers were 126,000. (Undercounts caused problems for service providers.) [The Hispanic population change was minor: up from 72% to 75%.] Nearly \$500,000 per year of the federal block rent money for code enforcement has been used. In 1990 there were no general fund positions for code enforcement in the Public Works Department Or The Regional Planning Department, there were only revenue driven positions. As of two years ago, the First District had been able to cover these positions; the problem also existed in the Fifth District. Modes of service delivery need to be studied; East Los Angeles has a garbage disposal district that was created one hundred years ago. Presently Public Works manages the contract on a five-year renewal basis, but there is still no automated selection, no oversight, or no franchise in garbage collection. There are also free markets, areas in the other unincorporated communities. The First District is working with the Fifth and Second District regarding these problems. (The Third District has a very small percentage of people who live in unincorporated areas; creating different concerns.)

Ms. Sutkin discussed the county income data: El Pueblo Project is the 150 year old county owned, blighted and neglected property across from Olvera Street, where Supervisor Molina would like to create an art and cultural park. Los Angeles County is in the preliminary environmental study stages of this project. Commissioner Boonshaft asked whether using private sector funds would be acceptable? Ms. Sutkin responded "Yes", and said that Supervisor Molina was creating a non-profit organization. This involved an incorporated board of governors with the outdoor venue concept. The prospective park is located next to a church (with 10,000 visits on a Saturday) and across from Olvera Street (a tourist attraction in the heart of Los Angeles). The incomes are low around the downtown area; therefore the project needs to be marketed throughout the county.

Ms. Sutkin geographically oriented the Commission by locating the First District on a large county map. In particular the Southeast section of the district was a thriving, middle class Hispanic area with a majority of home ownership; an interest in their environment (particularly in the Los Angeles River); transportation; neighborhood improvement projects; the court system; air pollution concerns; and the need for new schools, parks and recreational areas. Proposition A Funds (bond measures from 1992 and 1996) are available and Supervisor Molina has invested in projects along the Los Angeles River through a master plan created in 1992. There was a new park in Maywood, park funds for the City of Bell Gardens, and the voters have supported a new State Park in the Cornfields.

The First District's greatest concentration of population lies in East Los Angeles, then the San Gabriel Valley cities including the City of Monterey Park, which has a large Asian population increase. Montebello is a middle class, Hispanic area where many people have relocated from East Los Angeles. Further east is El Monte, which has a very large number of county facilities, including the DPSS building on Telstar and the 10 Freeway. There have been creative property exchanges with the redevelopment area. Further east is Baldwin Park and a large unincorporated, underserved and misunderstood Valinda Area with 90,000 residents (including Basset which needs a service/civic center model to insure that many residents realize that the county supervisor is their local representative). The furthest east is the City of Pomona, which would like more redevelopment of the Fairplex (another county asset).

Santa Fe Springs is in the southeastern corner of the First District and is an important partner of the unincorporated area of South Whittier. The area has a service center and is a model for unincorporated areas. Pico Rivera, which is Supervisor Molina's hometown, has a flood control project and redevelopment opportunities.

Ms. Sutkin handed out charts indicating the raw numbers for each of the communities: i.e., population, registered voters, median income, the number of county facilities, and the number of parcels.

Population count seems to vary in East Los Angeles between the Assessor's count of 110,000 people and the Library's 66,000 (90022 zip code area). Ms. Sutkin suggested that the Commission could help in suggesting a unified census count within the Los Angeles County Departments. The First District has tried to specify what a bureaucrat/elected official needs to know in order to arrive at practical strategic work plans to solve constituents' problems; i.e., the East Los Angeles Civic Center which is located in the center at Third Street and Mednick. It is not identified as a "Civic Center", because separate facilities exist: there is a Sheriff's station, a County Court House, the Roybal Family Mental Health Center, a Probation Center, a Library, a lake and park area. The local Presiding Judge has received comments from citizens that neither the "Civic Center" nor the Court House were very "nice" places. The Sheriff's Department buses inmates into the jail. In the back of the park there is a Special Enforcement Bureau with Regional River Rescue, Swat helicopters, armored personnel vehicles, as well as the Pomona Freeway, which has no sound walls or landscaping.

In 1999, the First District surveyed 2400 people asking whether they had visited the East Los Angeles Civic Center: surprisingly, 47% said no, and 34%, yes. This indicated that almost half of the people had no concept of the civic center even though 83% said they had used one or more of the center's facilities. There is no one in charge, no kiosk, no phone numbers at the site to report problems, no sense of community, the area feels unsafe and insufficient public parking. The first goal was to refurbish the East Los Angeles Civic Center using an urban design plan: creating plazas constructing picnic shelters; playgrounds; rebuilding the

Library (in the location the demolished courthouse), relocating City Hall and adding a child care center. The project is funded. The existing Library will be turned into a City Hall with an information center where citizen's can come for local services in East Los Angeles). An information facility, the First District, the Building and Safety Field Office, the Regional Planning Inspector, and the Community Development person in a community office would relocate there. This would create a sense of East Los Angeles local government.

When the citizens were asked the surveyed question "Should the Civic Center have a City Hall?" the answers were definitively "Yes" from residents who live in East Los Angeles and "No" from those residing in Monterey Park.

Commissioner Farrar remarked that the juxtaposition of the presentations of the First and the Third Districts allowed the commissioners to see how radically different the county government was in each of the two districts: the Third District's issue was transportation; whereas the First District dealt with becoming a city. What is the policy position with respect to incorporating all of the unincorporated areas? Ms. Sutkin responded that it varies by area. East Los Angeles should not be annexed by the City of Los Angeles because ELA's services would not improve. Huntington Park wants to annex the large commercially zoned areas on Alameda and Florence. The First District is working with the unincorporated strategic plan and dealing with the lack of procedure in the Local Formation Agency Commission (LAFCO) policies for annexation. Commissioner Hill congratulated the First District for its three-route shuttle system called El Sol that meets at the Civic Center in East Los Angeles and stops in the neighborhoods. Ms. Sutkin thanked Commissioner Hill and explained that its route involved a wide variety of neighborhood stops.

Chairman Philibosian thanked Ms. Sutkin for her presentation, and said questions could be directed to her at 213-974-4111 in Supervisor Molina's office.

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