

ATTACHMENT

July 31, 2007

The Honorable Rodney Melville
Presiding Judge, Superior Court
County of Santa Barbara
312 M East Cook Street
Santa Maria, California 93455

County Civil Grand Jury,
Attention Foreman Albert Mercado
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Dear Judge Melville:

This letter is in response to the Civil Grand Jury's letter to the Mayor dated May 17, 2007, requesting a response to its 2006-2007 report entitled *Representation in Local Government: Why and How it Should be Improved*. The response is provided pursuant to the requirements of state Penal Code Section 933(c).

I have enclosed with this letter the response to the findings and recommendation contained in that report as approved by the Santa Barbara City Council at its regular meeting of July 31, 2007. Feel free to contact me, or Santa Barbara City Attorney Stephen Wiley, should you have any questions concerning the City's response or if you need anything further from the City.

Yours truly,

Marty Blum
Mayor

Enclosure

C: James L. Armstrong, City Administrator
Stephen P. Wiley, City Attorney
Cyndi Rodriguez, City Clerk

Response of the City Council of the City of Santa Barbara to the report of the 2006-2007 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury entitled "Representation in Local Government: Why and How it Should be Improved."

This response is provided in accordance with state Penal Code Section 933.05 (b) which requires public entities, other than county entities and county officials, to submit a written response to each applicable finding and recommendation within ninety (90) days of the date of the Grand Jury's report.

Finding 1

The level of participation in city elections by precincts correlates well with income levels for similar geographic areas.

Response: The lower level of participation in areas of less income is true throughout the United States. In Santa Barbara elections are conducted so that each neighborhood has a voting place, and outreach is done by various groups to invite more residents to participate.

Finding 2

The neighborhoods where elected officials live in the city correlate well with those areas having relatively high income and voter turnout.

Response: We agree that this has been the case in the past. However, the current composition of the Council is showing a different trend. A contributing factor to the change could be the recent pay hike approved by the voters which allows more people to be able to serve. This considerable pay hike has resulted in four council members who say they could not have run without this Charter amendment. Three of them are in your map's "\$" areas, or lowest income levels. The fourth is a renter, an owner of a small business.

Finding 3

The at-large election system in the city clearly favors those candidates with the broadest appeal and socioeconomic circumstances which result in funding.

Response: It is true that the "at-large" system favors candidates with the broadest appeal. That is what an election is about; to elect those with the highest number of votes which shows they have the broadest appeal.

Finding 4

A candidate lacking broad city appeal and favorable socioeconomic connections might, nevertheless, be very popular within a specific district and better able to represent it.

Response: The most recent Council Members have been focused on various issues, championing the homeless, our youth, solid waste, underrepresented minority rights, and so on. Each Council Member takes on several liaison positions to boards and commissions. Three of those liaison positions are neighborhood centers in the lowest income areas of our City, the Lower Westside Center, the Westside Center, and the Franklin Center on the Eastside. Those council member liaisons are tuned into those low income areas. The entire Council focuses on various neighborhoods as the subjects come up. This is a system that is working and has worked for quite awhile.

Many in our community feel that our entire population has many champions on our City Council, and they doubt that better representatives would necessarily be found via the district elections route.

Finding 5

Citizen advisory panels, boards and commissions have a strong influence on city government, and the absence of broad citizen representation results in excessive influence by interest groups that have the time and money to participate.

Response: Over 200 people serve on boards and commissions in the City of Santa Barbara. There is no means test, so it is hard to know how representative of the general electorate those 200 plus people are. The City Council has not appointed people as representatives of certain interest groups to various boards or commissions. The Council has appointed individuals who are active in the community, who interview well, who may or may not be known to the council members. Their allegiance to one interest group is of concern but not the only factor in their selection.

Recommendation 1

The Santa Barbara City Council should place before the voters a ballot measure to amend the City Charter so as to implement a hybrid election system. This new system should provide for an at-large election of a Mayor and Vice-Mayor and for district election of all other council members from districts defined by identifiable neighborhoods in the city.

Response: When the City of Santa Barbara was first incorporated in 1850, the Mayor and Council Members were elected at large. In 1876, they were elected by wards. In 1907, the electorate went back to the at large system. In 1927, it was back to wards until 1968 in which they were elected again at large. This current time is the longest stretch of history without changing to the ward system. To our knowledge, the hybrid system has never been proposed nor has a directly-elected Vice-Mayor.

Currently the Mayor Pro Tem position is rotated among the Council Members in order to cover for the Mayor when the Mayor is out of town or attending another event. Up until now, no one has questioned the need for a directly-elected Vice-Mayor which would have the same term as the Mayor. The City of Santa Barbara's charter would have to be amended in some fashion to account for the existence of the Vice-Mayor, defining his or her responsibilities, term of office, limits on the term, and so on.

It is normally up to the voters to collect signatures to get something on the ballot. This Council believes that the cost of elections is a very large barrier, but one which the Grand Jury did not address. We are currently struggling with changes to our election rules in order to help those who have limited means but who would make good representatives.

Recommendation 2

The Santa Barbara City Council should implement a system for selecting members for advisory panels, boards and commissions which assures that such groups include representatives from all identifiable neighborhoods and/or electoral districts that might be affected by advice rendered.

Response: We agree that city advisory boards and commissions should be representative of and express the views of the fabric of our community. In fact, last fiscal year the City Council established a Council Subcommittee to do just that.

The City Clerk's Office provided many hours of staff support to the City Advisory Group Subcommittee. The Subcommittee met six times with a focus on the composition of Board/Commissions (size of committees, categories and diversity) and outreach efforts.

To assist the City with our outreach efforts, the City Clerk's Office produced a City Advisory Group brochure and participated in a clip featured on Inside Santa Barbara.

Sensitive of the fact that some people don't feel comfortable speaking at a meeting of the City Council during the application process, an additional meeting is held at a community center to consider applicants in a smaller setting.

We have also developed an online application process for the 32 City Advisory Groups. The application was made available on the City's website in April 2006, allowing applicants to complete and submit applications electronically.

The City Clerk's Office promoted the online application during the semi-annual, annual and special recruitments, on City TV Channel 18, press releases, City Council and City staff meetings. All applications are available for viewing online, thereby eliminating the need to photocopy applications.

It should be noted that with 32 City Advisory Groups, the efforts we have made contribute to the goal of having advisory group members who can provide a fair representation of community wide interests and views. In fact, we have more advisory groups than the cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles. A recent survey showed that there are only two cities that have more Boards and Commissions than the City of Santa Barbara: Berkeley with 41 and Sacramento with 34.