

The lesson drawn from both downtown and Playa Vista is again that the more incessant the public dialogue and the more individuals and local entities are encouraged to participate in the development process, the better the results. To further the potential of this type of hyper-incremental planning dialogue, the most important infrastructure that needs to be improved in this city, indeed in most cities, is the process itself: making it more efficient and providing that it is inclusive of many viewpoints, both of which the City of Los Angeles is working to address. The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment now sponsors an ongoing Neighborhood Empowerment Academy and once-a-year neighborhood congresses in which all the local councils come together, meet with elected officials, discuss the current issues, and seek to better organize their processes and learn from their failures as well as their successes. After an initial rush of neighborhood council formation in communities where interest was high, the city also found that to ensure inclusiveness, it needed to make a concerted effort to seed councils in poorer neighborhoods and communities of color that did not initially self-organize. At this point, five years after the organizing process began, the city is almost completely blanketed by active councils.

Regardless of the increased means for local input, too many people still do not participate and contribute their opinions. Lack of participation may in part be the result of apathy and cynicism with regard to the potential of politics in general and local planning politics in particular to engender positive results, particularly when implementation takes so long. Lack of a wider range of input may also be due to the fact that people's lives are busier than ever. The number of issues that get vetted at simultaneous meeting opportunities is vast. There are simply too many meetings sponsored by too many organizations. Long-term success for the neighborhood councils may depend on their ability to usurp the need for so many duplicative and overlapping efforts. On the city's part, a concerted effort will need to be made to channel most public planning discourse toward the councils, thereby increasing their profile and role in the local communities. In essence, the neighborhood councils have to become the modern-day equivalents of the New England town meetings Tocqueville observed 175 years ago. With over ninety councils formed (in a city with only fifteen council districts), realizing increased participation is guaranteed. If nothing else, the large number of geographically dispersed councils ensures that a wider range of viewpoints will emerge, mitigating the