

On behalf of Westwood Forward, a coalition of UCLA graduate and undergraduate student leaders, faculty, staff members, Westwood Homeowners, Renters, and Business leaders, we invite you to join us for a discussion over the next few months that will determine the future of our beloved community. When we see Westwood's lack of affordable housing; sky-high rent prices; long-vacant buildings; and a complete lack of places to dance, listen to live music, or play pool, you'd think our elected representatives would do something about it. You'd think they'd see a problem with the fact that residents of one of the largest college towns in the country have to go all the way to Hollywood or Santa Monica to have a night out. You'd think they'd be jumping to change or offer variances on regulations that have prevented numerous popular businesses from coming into Westwood. You'd think they'd work to better engage with their stakeholders when their voter turnout is far less than 1%. And you'd think they'd feel a humanitarian sense of urgency to bring significantly more housing into our community when our crippling housing shortage is forcing students into homelessness or deep into debt just to live in squalid conditions with numerous roommates. You'd think – but unfortunately our Westwood Neighborhood Council has done the exact opposite:

They have repeatedly opposed UCLA's housing projects^{1 2}, fraternity houses³ and private housing development projects⁴ that would considerably alleviate our housing crisis, citing the fact that these projects have “too many units” as if we weren't in desperate need of more units, “too few parking spaces” even as these projects would diminish the number of cars driven into Westwood by allowing students to walk to class rather than drive in or bus in from afar, and alleged negative aesthetic impacts that they somehow find more important than addressing the basic human need of providing a roof over our heads.⁵ They have also opposed allowing accessory dwelling units which could sustainably provide housing for hundreds in our units in structures that are already built.⁶

They have also stifled business in Westwood by opposing places like Rocco's⁷ over nonsense complaints over their design and operations, opposing the alcohol selling permits of a range of establishments from Spireworks to Target and even opposing a liquor permit to D1 Café over the owner's status as an Iranian immigrant with imperfect fluency in English.⁸ Restaurants like Barney's Beanery/Q's offer real entertainment at all of their locations except for Westwood because they know our Neighborhood Council will fight them; indeed, when they even just suggested offering reduced price drinks to attract students in the middle of the great recession, the Neighborhood Council not only opposed them,⁹ but went on to fight the City of Los Angeles'

¹ <http://dailybruin.com/2017/09/16/westwood-neighborhood-council-recap-sept-14-2/>

² <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-06152011.pdf>

³ <http://www.wwnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-april-2016/>

⁴ <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-12102014.pdf>

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<http://dailybruin.com/2017/10/02/editorial-housing-for-ucla-students-should-be-prioritized-over-village-aesthetic/>

⁶ <http://www.wwnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-may-2016/>

⁷ <http://www.wwnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-august-2016/>

⁸ <http://dailybruin.com/2017/01/22/westwood-business-owners-struggle-to-obtain-liquor-licenses/>

⁹ <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-02082012.pdf>

policy of not enforcing such conditions as those prohibiting Happy Hours.¹⁰ Most businesses that would want to offer nightlife in Westwood realize it's not worth wasting all of the time and money on land acquisition and design to try to come to Westwood because they see that even before they'd need to go to the City and State for approval, they'd have to go through the Neighborhood Council's Land Use Committee. This Committee has a default list of 32 conditions posted on their front page prohibiting everything from Happy Hours and Dancing to Pool Tables and Pitchers and mandating that the establishments always operate primarily as a restaurant and only secondarily as a place that sells alcohol.¹¹ Most businesses that do come into Westwood have to voluntarily accept these conditions so that the Neighborhood Council doesn't oppose them, since City Commissions tend to uphold the judgments of the neighborhoods and these businesses don't want to risk not opening over dancing; but the result is that our community is left with no place more exciting than mere restaurants at which we can order drinks with our meals. They've also opposed numerous popular restaurants such as Lemonade¹² from coming into Westwood over antiquated and infeasible parking expectations that make no sense for venues that would primarily serve students and other residents who live in walking distance. In those cases City administrators took the rare step of ignoring them, they've supported appeals^{13 14} of these decisions that cost these businesses further months of time and litigation and drove places like Lemonade away from Westwood altogether. They also opposed the Business Improvement District's suggestion that food uses be redefined in the Village Specific Plan¹⁵ in a manner that would allow more popular fast casual and incidental uses to open in the Village;¹⁶ it's rare that City Councilmember expresses such an eagerness to make *ad hoc* changes to a Specific Plan rather than wait years for a comprehensive overhaul and it's absurd that our community would pass on this opportunity and keep turning businesses away for year, in the meantime! They have also opposed measures that would make Westwood more accessible and inclusive to our community such as efforts to install bike lanes¹⁷ and a pedestrian plaza.¹⁸

They have also operated in a fundamentally undemocratic manner and sought to marginalize the voices of students and renters. They voted to extend their terms to 4 years¹⁹ even though roughly half of their stakeholders are students and doing so would make it far harder for most students to serve,²⁰ since most students are here no longer than 4 years and elections are not held until May or June. When the City asked them how to go about moving Neighborhood Council elections to odd years starting in 2021, they undemocratically asked the City to Extend

¹⁰ <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-december-2015/>

¹¹ <http://www.wvnc.org/assets/committees/WVNC%20LUPC%20SAMPLE%20ALCOHOL%20CONDITIONS.pdf>

¹² <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-may-2015/>

¹³ <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-november-2015/>

¹⁴ <http://www.wvnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-12102014.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-september-2017/>

¹⁶ <http://dailybruin.com/2017/09/22/update-to-westwood-village-plan-may-fill-vacancies-with-new-restaurants/>

¹⁷ <http://www.wvnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-03192014.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-november-2015/>

¹⁹ <http://www.wvnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-november-2016/>

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<http://dailybruin.com/2016/11/16/editorial-new-westwood-neighborhood-council-terms-inhibit-student-involvement/>

their current terms by a year to 2019²¹ even though all of the city's other recommended options would have involved holding a 2018 election as planned²² and even though none of their stakeholders elected them to serve for the 2018-2019 year. Once their bylaws committee and leadership put forward an amendment that would have limited students to voting on just one out of nineteen seats; and they brazenly admitted they were doing so over concerns that UCLA students could drown out homeowners with their numbers if they were ever rallied to vote.²³ Though that measure was defeated because it blatantly violated the City's guidelines in arbitrarily discriminating against classes of stakeholders, members of the Council's leadership have continued to publicly state that students and renters shouldn't have as much say in what happens in Westwood because we don't pay taxes on multi-million dollar homes or to stay in Westwood as long as they do.²⁴

They have also shown their contempt for students giving public comment at meetings by shouting them down, chastising them, calling student statements "disgusting" and the Daily Bruin "fake news," and refusing to consider their proposals. Perhaps worst of all, they have repeatedly suppressed the student vote by refusing to follow the majority of Neighborhood Councils²⁵ in allowing the City to facilitate secure online voting^{26 27} despite our community's insistence that this poses a significant barrier to student participation.²⁸ This created a perfect storm to disenfranchise UCLA's students in the 2016 election, as they offered just one in-person polling place all of the way on South Sepulveda from 9am to 3pm on just one day²⁹ that happened to be during UCLA's Finals Week.³⁰ Of course this location had plenty of free parking for homeowners; but it was more than a 30 minute walk each way for UCLA students living on the Hill and was about as far as one can get from the majority of the student body while still being in Westwood.³¹ The result is that in our community of likely more than 90,000 stakeholders, only 496 people voted and a homeowner majority was elected with just 87 homeowner votes with 5 members getting elected to seats for which students weren't eligible with just 1 to 10 votes; indeed, 2 members only got one single vote that they likely cast for themselves.³²

²¹ <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Minutes-05102017.pdf>

²² <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Motion-2019-Elections.pdf>

²³ <http://www.wwnc.org/assets/agenda-minutes/Board%20Minutes-05112011.pdf>

²⁴ <http://dailybruin.com/2017/06/11/westwood-community-polarized-over-improving-village-nightlife/>

²⁵ http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2015/15-1022-S2_rpt_DONE_08-03-2017.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.wwnc.org/general-board-meeting-minutes-may-2017/>

²⁷ <http://dailybruin.com/2015/09/25/westwood-neighborhood-council-contests-removal-of-vote-by-mail-option/>

²⁸ <http://dailybruin.com/2017/04/12/editorial-online-voting-would-increase-turnout-in-neighborhood-council-elections/>

²⁹ <https://empowerla.org/elections/region11/wwnc16/>

³⁰ <http://www.registrar.ucla.edu/Portals/50/Documents/calendar-archive/academiccalendar15-16.pdf>

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<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Hedrick+Hall,+De+Neve+Drive,+Los+Angeles,+CA/1350+S+Sepulveda+Blvd,+Los+Angeles,+CA+90025/@34.0630004,-118.4621194,15z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x80c2bc926ea25447:0x6b58b1ab67a6dc2e!2m2!1d-118.4523152!2d34.0731836!1m5!1m1!1s0x80c2bb7bbca20adf:0xf7c0660c256d6a03!2m2!1d-118.4481111!2d34.0531294!3e2>

³² <https://empowerla.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WWNC-2016-Official-Canvass-of-Votes.pdf>

Yet, this council claims to represent our community and the City will continue heeding their recommendations as if they do until we do something about it. This is incredibly dangerous not only because it means businesses and housing developments are being turned away, rather than welcomed as they should be; but also because Westwood has an opportunity over the next few years to change its specific plans and also because there will be immense interest on the part of the City to get Westwood ready for the Purple Line Extension and hosting the Olympics. If the community shows it is ready to embrace the future, we have a real shot at zoning for significantly more housing and revitalizing our nightlife and business community; but if the Council representing our community continues to fight this change, then we will be left behind. Unfortunately, there is no way to recall our Neighborhood Councilmembers or hold referenda on their decisions; so we are on course to not have any way to democratically influence this council until 2019, and that election would again not be online and the apportionment of its seats would continue to guarantee homeowners a disproportionate share of power that nearly guarantees their majority *in perpetuity*.

Thankfully, there is a way for us to break this cycle and secure the representation our community deserves this year. We can petition to start our own Neighborhood Council that would represent UCLA, the areas that are predominantly housing for the UCLA community, and the business area that is primarily frequented by the members of this community. This plan would include all stakeholders within these boundaries, from homeowners to students to commuting employees to renters and business owners. But because our proposed bylaws would mandate online voting whenever possible, and because the composition of the board would accurately reflect the composition of the community, we have no doubt that this neighborhood council would reflect the values of the community. It would work to respect the interests of all and clean up and preserve the historic beauty of our community while boldly charging ahead to fight for the housing and entertainment we need to revitalize the amazing place that is Westwood. You can check out our proposed bylaws and boundaries at Westwoodforward.com and please reach out to us with your thoughts on how we can make this proposal better. Over the next month we'll be inviting stakeholders to sign our petition – though we only need 200, our goal is 2,000 and we'll also be visiting student associations, resident associations, business associations, and other stakeholder communities to solicit feedback and invite you to consider passing resolutions in support. Then once we've turned in our petition, the City should conduct an election within 3 months that will include the entire Westwood Community, and should also include online voting, that will allow *all* of Westwood's stakeholders to determine whether we're stronger as a community with not one, but two Neighborhood Councils.

Westwood Forward is a coalition from start to finish. We invite all members of the Westwood Community who are interested in amplifying our call and supporting our efforts to join us. Join us by signing and circulating our petition to ensure that the voices of all – not the voices of a select elite of “property owners” as some Westwood Neighborhood Council members would have it – are heard. Join us by liking our Facebook page “Westwood Forward” to keep in touch with the coalition and stay up to date with our progress. Join us in fighting for a more welcoming, a more inclusive, a more forward-thinking Westwood. Join Westwood Forward. This community is yours, too!

Signed,

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