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Up Close and Personal

Owners of Hollywood businesses, properties have worked with local politicians to achieve real successes.

By JEFFREY C. BRIGGS

LOCAL politics are in the media spotlight with a dismissive tone. But politicians at the local level understand far better than U.S. senators that the rubber of their election promises meet the hard road of democracy in the local neighborhoods they represent.

When government gets too big to see the neighborhood trees amid the forest of the city, county, state or nation, it takes local politicians willing to work with and to be responsive to community residents and business owners to actually get things done. If they don't, they get un-elected.

Hollywood's renaissance is a great example of local government at work with, and accountable to, its residents and property and business owners. The Hollywood Entertainment Business Improvement District, recently lauded for its success in a Business Journal column, is one of just four such districts now active in Hollywood, each supported by a self-imposed – and then self-directed – property ownership tax. (Sunset-Vine, Hollywood Media and East Hollywood are the other Hollywood-area BIDs.) These BIDs fund extra trash bins and waste collection, graffiti removal, security, sidewalk cleaning and other services general city and state tax payments don't support. The state laws that enable creation of these districts expressly acknowledge that getting things done at the local level increasingly requires neighborhood stakeholders to take matters into their own hands.

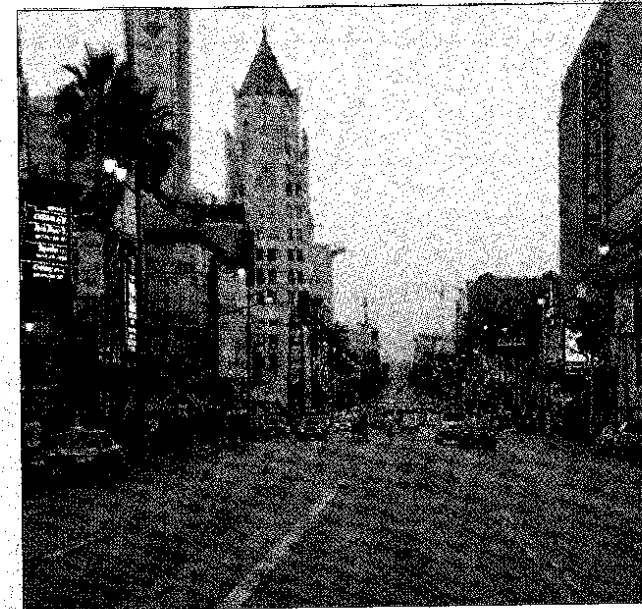
Neighborhood stakeholders need local government support, but local politicians are pushed as often as they have to pull. Hollywood residents, and business and property owners most recently have come together with area non-profit and government service providers to stop managing and to start ending homelessness in Hollywood. Local city and county electeds and their staffs are right there with them with sleeves rolled up at

the same meetings, but it was the community that took the bull by the horns. Nobody – including the politicians – cares what anyone already has done, only what they are going to do next; nobody cares who gets the credit, only that something gets done for which credit is due.

True, when local politicians and their staffs come together with residents, and property and business owners at BID meetings, neighborhood councils, and at citizen-police advisory and chamber of commerce conferences, they don't solve problems in the Middle East or the international trade imbalance. But collectively they make telephone calls, send e-mails, write letters, and lobby county, state and federal transportation departments to relight local traffic message signs and widen streets to help traffic flow; they form volunteer promotional teams to attend development conferences in other communities to attract new businesses to their own neighborhoods; they work with developers to ensure that inevitable growth does not inevitably mean gridlock, but rather more jobs, a measure of affordable housing, and designs that can effect transit behavioral change; they find funds to create park space out of the air over a freeway trench; they support non-profit organizations that provide the community with everything from graffiti removal to after-school athletic programs; and they perform myriad other tasks that genuinely contribute to the well-being of their immediate communities.

Moreover, local politicians come together with their neighborhoods not as Democrats, Republicans, independents, Greens or Libertarians, but simply as citizens with common interests in their immediate environs. "Left" and "right" on the "bigger" issues of the day have no place at the table; what they think about global warming or the global war on terror, or about NAFTA and NASA, is irrelevant to the immediate job at hand in their own backyards. They talk and listen with respect, without demagoguery, and with a common desire to accomplish real tasks and to achieve mutually beneficial goals whose impact they all see and feel every day. The local politician does not always agree with her constituents, but she learns to find common ground, to make actual decisions and actually get things done – and then lives with the consequences at the local ballot box. What a concept!

"Change" can occur rapidly at the local level, as the Holly-



Facelift: Hollywood Boulevard near Highland Avenue.

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wood experience is showing. Accountability at the local governmental level is high. But the farther "up" the political chain one goes – to state legislatures or the U.S. Congress – the more stalemate becomes the norm. So if government "experience" is to be measured by actual accomplishment of things that directly affect a politician's voters, I'll take my local city councilmember over a U.S. senator any day.

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