

Summer “Wins”

Item #1...In last month's President's Report, I outlined the many calls – most of them wrong numbers – I had to make simply to get an overgrown vacant lot on McLennan cleared of brush. (Slide 2) Seriously overgrown lots are hazardous for many reasons; the possibility of fire, homes for rodents, community trash repositories, neighborhood council meetings... (Slide 3) Ultimately, the right entity to speak with for overgrown vacant residential lots happened to be the local firehouse. Within hours of my call, Firehouse 100 sent over an investigator to review the situation. They contacted the owner who then had three weeks to clear the lot of brush. (Slide 4) I don't know when it was done, but it was done and the McLennan Street neighborhood is much better off for it. Thanks to Firehouse 100 and concerned stakeholder Lisa who brought this to our attention.

Item #2...The MTA exports graffiti. They don't do it on purpose, but there is no kind way to say it. There is no politically correct way to couch it. The MTA exports graffiti – and they imported it right into our district. Case in point is the work being done to install traffic lights for the Orange Line at Victory and Densmore. MTA and its contractors brought in white cement “K” rails to protect the workers from traffic. That's a good thing. But one of the K rails was not clean. (Slide 5) It was filled with graffiti from Lester or Jester and RFD and, from the looks of it, “Cher” might've gotten her name in there too. (Slide 6) They even brought in a free standing sign that was tagged courtesy of BOV and VAPEHR. As a part of my own social experiment, I didn't call in the offense for about two weeks, wondering if, indeed, a little graffiti can lead to a lot. Well, duh, sure enough, within that time, three more K rails got tagged by our own local talent DES and MRPL and PENSOR. That morning, I talked to Officer Ron Carter about the situation and later in the day, I spoke to the Department of Transportation who told me that their standing policy was always to bring out clean signs and rails to construction areas. I learned that, as this was the Orange Line, it was a Metropolitan Transit Authority issue. So I got on the phone and called the MTA to complain and was given the direct line to Pete Serdienes who promptly -- didn't call me back. But within two days, the new graffiti from DES and MRPL and PENSOR was gone! I called Pete to leave another message thanking him for his quick response but also telling him that the K rail with Lester or Jester, RFD and Cher was still not cleaned up. I waited another day for Pete to call me back or do something. He did neither, but I did hear from him late on the fourth day – whereupon he told me he was not the guy to speak to at all. He only did bus stop graffiti – not construction graffiti. So he turned me on to Mark Van Gessel who handles MTA construction. I got in touch with Mark and explained the situation – how someone had only done half the job of cleaning up the graffiti – and Mark was sympathetic and told me that, this being Friday, the earliest he could get someone out would be Monday. I told him we had to do better than that; that this situation has been going on for a while and that we cannot tolerate another weekend of tagging. I offered to paint the rail myself if the MTA would be willing to reimburse me. Mark said he'd call me back with an answer. Within hours, he called me back and told me the graffiti would be removed the next day, on Saturday. And it was gone by Saturday afternoon.

In the aftermath, of greater concern to me, really, is that in my conversations with Mark, even though I questioned him directly about it, I could not discern whether MTA had the same “clean” rails and signs policy as DOT (Department of Transportation). MTA uses outside contracts for work. Couldn't there be a “personal responsibility” clause in these County contracts that obligates contractors to keep and maintain clean worksites – particularly when it concerns graffiti? What's wrong with MTA and its contractors carrying an extra bucket of paint in the back of the truck? How difficult could that be? Next month, I will introduce a resolution regarding the insidiousness of graffiti, the damage it does to the psyche and the spirit of our neighborhoods, and how Los Angeles County and MTA must be more aware and by far more vigilant in protecting our communities from this crime, by first not exporting it to our streets and secondly, not allowing it to stay in our communities past 6 a.m. each and every work day.