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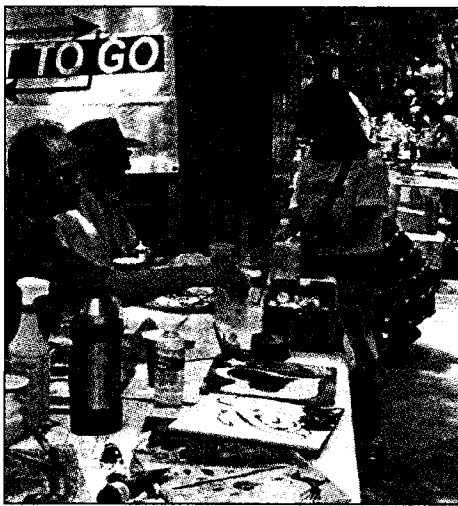
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# Success and Growing Pains

*The Downtown Neighborhood Council Learns  
That It's Hard to Escape the Politics*



*photo by Gary Leonard*

*The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council's biggest success was the creation of Gallery Row; its monthly art walks draw hundreds. The all-volunteer organization, however, has struggled with politics and policy issues.*

BY CHRIS COATES  
STAFF WRITER

When city officials certified the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (DLANC) in 2002, it marked not only the continuation of an experiment in civic democracy, but a unique opportunity for a

**CITYSCAPE**

nascent community to have a say in its development and its future. With the Downtown residential explosion coinciding with the installation of neighborhood councils, DLANC's board of directors saw the potential to impact a burgeoning neighborhood from the very beginning.

Three years later, the results are decidedly mixed. The unpaid and all-volunteer DLANC has notched some impressive achievements, most notably the creation of the Gallery Row arts scene. However, it has

also been beset by politicking and policy issues. The monthly board meetings — with an often unwieldy 27 members — are plagued by delays and confusion sparked from the merry-go-round of sending issues to the board, to a committee for further study, and back to the board again. Like many of the approximately 90 neighborhood councils that have arrived in Los Angeles since 2001, decisions often move at the speed of molasses.

"I see this neighborhood council as doing a great deal of work," said Greg Nelson, the general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), the city entity that oversees neighborhood councils. "If the worst of the problems is that they are sluggish right now, that's a good thing. . . . In the Downtown neighborhood council, they've got a lot of great tools. All the skills are there."

The problem, say some, is that those on the DLANC board have not yet figured out how to best wield those tools and skills. Even DLANC has taken the tactic of shifting some of its most promising developments out of its own hands, hoping to avoid bureaucracy. DLANC, like many neighborhood councils, is experiencing unanticipated growing pains.

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