

Attachment
From Los Feliz Business Owner
Allison B. Cohen
Los Feliz Ledger/Larchmont Ledger

I protest the CONTINUED OPERATION of the Los Feliz Business Improvement District. I am opposed to the continued operation of the District for the following reasons:

SUMMARY: Lack of transparency, professionalism, marketing strategy, efficiency, urgency, assistance, financial soundness and instead Brown Act violations, improper election practices, cronyism and a lack of credentials.

The LFBVID will argue they are an all-volunteer organization. That's true. But our tens of thousands of dollars in assessments are required by the city of Los Angeles, not volunteered, and as such, we business owners/taxpayers deserve better.

DETAIL:

1. Lack of transparency/Brown Act violations regarding budget, expenditures, agendas and meeting minutes (nothing mailed and nothing available on website). There were no meeting minutes posted at all in either 2010 or 2011; only one set of minutes posted in 2012 and none posted since then.
2. Participation in returning ballots for the LFBVID have declined dramatically over the years, as follows:
 - a. 2008 24%
 - b. 2009 11.7%
 - c. 2010 14.5%
 - d. 2011 N/A
 - e. 2012 N/A
 - f. 2013 3% (*this represents 10 returned ballots*)
 - g. 2014 9% (please note: a slate of 6 candidates ran this year and actively campaigned).
3. A lack of professionalism regarding elections. Ballots are mailed to LFBVID members erratically and often weeks after the advertised mailing date and always during the December holidays. Little to no outreach is done to attract new candidates. Any last minute timetable for elections is not adhered to.

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4. A lack of transparency regarding elections, including ballot irregularities. Such were raised for the 2015 election (ballots mailed 12/22/14) to both the LFVBID President and the Los Angeles City Clerk, including the improper receipt of a stack of ballots by one candidate and the counting of ballots received via email from a former LFVBID President. There was no language in any LFVBID materials that ballots could be received via email, yet they were counted (and the two ballots changed the outcome of the election).
5. A lack of strategic use of collected assessments. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the LFVBID's budget is used for sidewalk washing and tree trimming—items that taxpayers already fund through the city. Assessments can and should be used for the purpose of bringing foot traffic (and dollars) into Los Feliz Village. Instead, the LFVBID focuses on paying for “mixers” for LVBID members to mingle with each other. While there is a place for such business-to-business mingling, this particular BID has no outside marketing focus.
6. A lack of professionalism and efficiency, for example: meetings start late and little is accomplished. Items that were being discussed when I sat on this board (2007-2008) have still not been accomplished (new business welcome kit and securing more parking in Los Feliz come to mind). I know the current board has been working on a “map” and listing of Los Feliz businesses for about a year now, but nothing has come of it (and when it is finally produced, it will simply be distributed locally to business owners that already know Los Feliz). Additionally, it was suggested years ago the LFVBID create a master calendar for the purpose of planning by its members. I recall one year when the LFVBID announced its Street Fair six weeks out, providing little to no time for proper planning if merchants wanted to participate.
6. A lack of assistance to merchants regarding city of Los Angeles issues. I know of two restaurant owners that actively sought the LFVBID's assistance with city issues, only to receive none.
7. A sense of cronyism. The LFVBID's governing board is run by the same people year after year. This is because very minimal outreach is done to attract new people to the board. An organization that has had the same president (Chris Serrano) for six years is not running itself well.

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8. A lack of proper credentials by governing board members. The LFVIB has a very high proportion of board members who are not business owners, but who are, instead, employees of others. For example, this year, there are six board members (out of 11) that are real estate agents working for large companies and one other board member who works in the mortgage banking industry. As this is a “merchant based” BID, the board should reflect “merchants” (business owners) in the area.

9. A lack of marketing strategy. Over the years (since 2005), I have witnessed a growing malaise in the Los Feliz business community in reference to the LFVBID. In the summer of 2005, the Los Feliz Street Fair was a major attraction for local retailers, restaurants and non-profits. Over the years, however, the local element of participation in the Street Fair dwindled so that most vendors were from outside the area. (I know, because as a reporter, I went booth to booth and asked.) The current LFVBID governing board took what was a vital and vibrant local event and turned it into a street fair that could have been staged most anywhere, with merchants from locations all over Southern California, instead of showcasing the unique qualities of Los Feliz. This resulted in a dramatic decline of local participation in the Street Fair and finally its cancellation.

10. A lack of financial soundness and responsibility. At one point, the LFVBID had \$14,000 in overdue payments to vendors. As one example of the governing board’s inability to manage itself, it took the LFVBID 13 months to pay their bill to the Los Feliz Ledger for advertising (one ad) in 2012.

There are many successful BID stories throughout Los Angeles, but this is not one of them. As a local business owner for the last 11 years, my business suffers due to the unimaginative, self-serving and lazy practices of the LFVBID. There is so much more we could be doing (and we tried in the 2015 elections with a slate of smart business owners in Los Feliz to get elected only to learn of election irregularities as mentioned above. Two of the slate were elected, but both eventually resigned their seats after witnessing the ineffectiveness of the LFVBID governing board first hand.) Los Feliz deserves better.