

“Sandy Brown, Westwood Neighborhood Council vice president, said although students are an important part of Westwood, she personally thinks the community’s permanent residents deserve to live without being disrupted by the nightlife.

‘What if you bought a house for \$4 million, and you’re paying \$40,000 just for taxes every year?’ Brown said. ‘Aren’t you going to be more conscious of what comes into your neighborhood than someone who’s only here for a few years and doesn’t pay any taxes, and then is gone?’” > Daily Bruin, <https://dailybruin.com/2017/06/11/westwood-community-polarized-over-improving-village-nightlife>

“More than 2,000 students, residents, business owners and employees voted in favor of creating the North Westwood Neighborhood Council. A group of student leaders, known as Westwood Forward, was among the principal backers of the new council. A total of 3,521 people voted in Tuesday’s election. Results were announced Friday. The North Westwood Neighborhood Council will oversee UCLA and Westwood village, the area’s primary business community. It will also advise the Los Angeles City Council on decisions pertaining to Westwood, along with the existing Westwood Neighborhood Council.

‘We’re absolutely ecstatic that for the first time in many years, perhaps the first time ever, there was a free and open election,’ said Michael Skiles, UCLA’s graduate student association president and a Westwood Forward group leader. ‘Above all, it’s about those segments of the community — the younger, the less permanently present, the less affluent segments of the community that usually have very little voice in local decision making — having come together.’” > LA Times, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-westwood-council-vote-20180525-story.html>

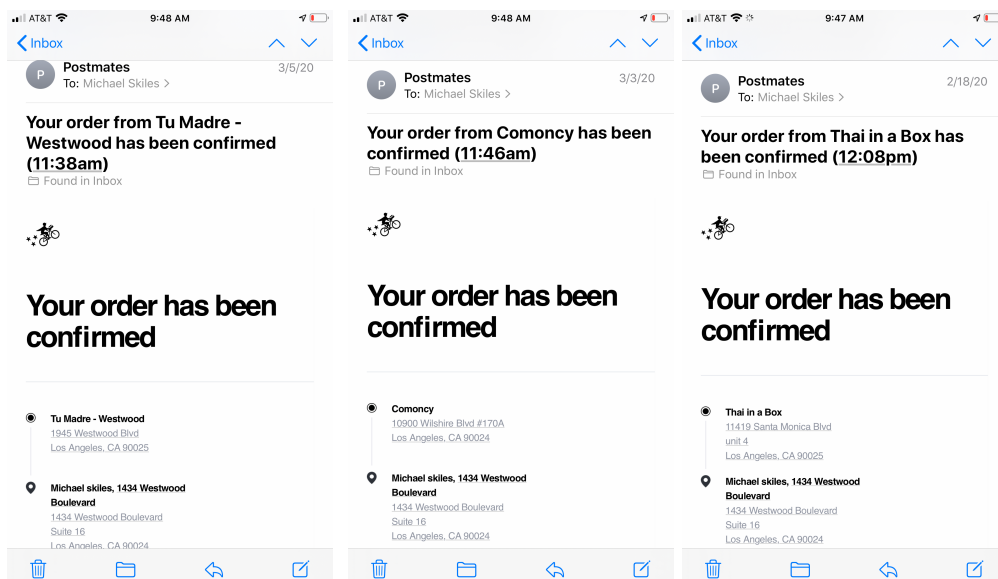
The above quotes, in my view, represent the most fundamental divide that motivated me to work to create our new North Westwood Neighborhood Council. While each student, renter and worker may, on average, be in this community for a smaller period of time than the average homeowner, our interests are aligned with the students, workers, and renters who will be here 5 years from now, 10 years from now and 20 years from now. The individual may be “transient,” but the needs of the largest stakeholder groups in Westwood are permanent. In my view, the failure of Westwood to allow enough housing to affordably house its students and workers, the failure of Westwood to allow more affordable fast food, fast casual, and entertainment venues for its students, renters, and workers, and the failure of Westwood to promote bike lanes and walkability all stemmed from Westwood’s failure to meaningfully include the perspectives of people aside from mostly affluent, car-centric, homeowners in making decisions that affect all of our community’s stakeholders.

To the extent that students, renters, and workers were allowed a seat at the table, they were proportionately under-represented, tokenized, and vastly outnumbered on boards claiming to represent a community of which they were the majority. The Westwood Neighborhood Council held its elections on Sunday Morning of finals week on Sepulveda South of Wilshire, making it very easy for homeowners with cars to participate and very difficult for pedestrian students

living on campus or commuting students or workers who were only in Westwood on weekdays. The Westwood Neighborhood Council tried to extend their terms to 4 years before the city rejected their bylaw amendment; this would have further ensured that almost all students serving were like-minded students they appointed. Finally, the Westwood Neighborhood Council made it very hard for students to stay on long enough to gain any significant influence or power. For instance, in the summer of 2018, WWNC President Lisa Chapman forced a student to resign from her renter seat after only a year because she had a summer internship in Washington D.C. and was, thus, for a very brief period not renting in Westwood. In order for students to be able to stay long enough to have anywhere near the influence of homeowners who can hold their seats for decades, it's important that such a student be seen as a "renter between leases" rather than someone who had ceased to be a renter and, as such, needed to resign or face removal.

I think Mrs. Chapman's grievance, in requesting that all board members reaffirm that they continue to meet the requirements of their specific seat is a cynically-timed ploy to try to oust non-homeowners from the council in a time that is not only the summer, but also a global pandemic. We are in a state of emergency which should not be treated as ordinary times. It stands to reason that due to the closure of UCLA's campus and the suspension of in-person work for many jobs, that board members may have temporarily moved elsewhere to save on exorbitant rents. The person who worked in Westwood until the Covid shutdown, who attended Church until the Covid shutdown or who lived in Westwood until the Covid shutdown may very well intend on returning to Westwood after the Covid shutdown—their temporary suspension of in-person presence within our community so as to avoid spreading this disease should not be misconstrued as a termination of their stakeholdership.

I feel compelled to demonstrate the falsity of Mrs. Chapman's unfounded claim that I merely listed 1434 Westwood Blvd as my place of business without ever actually working there. From the time I stopped renting in Westwood in February until the Covid shutdown, here are some Postmates confirmations from when I was too busy to get away from my desk for lunch:



However, I do not feel compelled to provide documentation to demonstrate the numerous ways in which I am presently a stakeholder. Though I could provide ample documentation to support numerous claims to stakeholdership, I decline to do so as a matter of principle and to shield my fellow board members from the undue invasions of privacy that establishing such a precedent would set. Our Council operates on principles of mutual respect, trust, and inclusivity. A culture of periodic demands of, “let me see your papers!” has no place in our community and is not required by any of our bylaws.

Nothing in our bylaws requires that councilmembers periodically, upon request, or on any other occasion reaffirm or provide documentation to prove their stakeholdership. To create an environment in which students, renters and workers could play a meaningful role in the council without the long-term stability inherent in home ownership, I crafted the bylaws to provide maximal flexibility in the following ways (bylaws in *Italics*, my commentary in regular font):

Article IV: “Neighborhood Council membership is open to all Stakeholders. “Stakeholders” shall be defined as those who live, work, or own real property in the neighborhood and also to those who declare a stake in the neighborhood as a community interest stakeholder, defined as a person who affirms a substantial and ongoing participation within the Neighborhood Council’s boundaries and who may be in a community organization such as, but not limited to, educational, non- profit and/or religious organizations.

Note the use of “declare” and “affirm” as opposed to “can prove” or “document.” Participation in many organizations can be informal and organizations themselves may be informal. I didn’t want to create a council in which people were constantly asked for documentation but rather one that included anyone who felt that they had any significant investment in our community.

ARTICLE V GOVERNING BOARD

The Board of Directors (“the Board”) shall be the Governing Body of the Council within the meaning of that term as set forth in the Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils Section 1: Composition - The Board shall consist of nineteen (19) Stakeholders, who must be eighteen (18) years of age or older, who are elected, selected or appointed by the Board and/or Community Stakeholders. The composition of the Board shall be as follows:

A. Homeowner Stakeholder Board Members (1) – Open to Stakeholders who own a residence that is located within the NC boundaries.

B. Renter Stakeholder Board Members (2) – Open to Stakeholders who rent a residence located within the NC boundaries.

C. General Residential Stakeholder (2) – Open to Stakeholders who live within the NC boundaries, either as a homeowner, renter, person who experiences homelessness, or person who sublets or otherwise resides within the boundaries. Approved Bylaws June 29, 2020 7

D. Business Stakeholder Board Members (3) – Open to Stakeholders who work at or own a business or business property within the NC boundaries.

E. Undergraduate Student Member (2)—Open to stakeholders who are undergraduate students at a university or college within the NC boundaries. Students need not be currently enrolled as

long as they have been enrolled within the past 180 days and intend to re-enroll within the next 180 days.

F. Graduate Student Member (1)—Open to stakeholders who are current graduate or professional students at a university or college within the NC boundaries. Students need not be currently enrolled as long as they have been enrolled within the past 180 days and intend to re-enroll within the next 180 days.

G. University Staff or Administrative Member (1) – Open to stakeholders who work at a university or college within the NC boundaries in a capacity in which they spend the majority of their time neither conducting research nor teaching. Employee need not be currently employed as long as they have been employed within the past 180 days and intend to be re-employed within the next 180 days.

H. Faculty Member (1) – Open to stakeholders who work at a university or college within the NC boundaries in a capacity in which they spend the majority of their time conducting research and/or teaching. Employee need not be currently employed as long as they have been employed within the past 180 days and intend to be re-employed within the next 180 days.

I. Worker Stakeholder (1) – Open to non-owner paid employees of a business, non- profit, or educational property within the NC boundaries.

J. Organizational Stakeholder Board Members (2) – Open to Stakeholders who actively participate in a religious organization, educational institution, community organization, non-profit organization, neighborhood association, chamber of commerce, business improvement district, sorority, fraternity, school/parent group, student association, arts association, service organization, cultural group, etc. that primarily operates within the NC boundaries.

K. At-Large Stakeholder Board Members (3) – Open to Stakeholders of any category

My reasons for creating the *General Residential Stakeholder* was because I knew it to be WWNC's practice of asking for a copy of the lease of everyone seeking to be a "renter" stakeholder, so I wanted to make sure that people experiencing homelessness, sleeping in cars, subletting, or living with friends or people with whom they were in a relationship would be able to serve in a seat for which the asking of documentation would be unreasonable. For all of the student and university staff and faculty positions, I also recognized that sometimes students took leave of absences and adjunct faculty went quarters without work assignments, so I built in a 180+ day grace period and, again, over the objection of certain opponents of the creation of our council specified that the council member's merely intending to resume this role, as opposed to having secured an offer they could document to resume this role sufficed for them to qualify for this seat. I also included 5 seats for very broadly defined organizational and at-large stakeholder board members to invite practically anyone with any strong ties to our community to participate.

Article V, Section 10: Resignation - A Board member may resign from the Council, and the position shall then be deemed vacant. Any member of the Board who ceases to be a Stakeholder is required to submit his or her resignation to the Board for discussion and action at a Board meeting. However, board members who remain stakeholders but whose stakeholder category has shifted may serve out the remainder of their term in the seat to which they were elected or selected (e.g. if a renter buys a home in Westwood, or an undergraduate student becomes a grad student, they could respectively retain their renter and undergrad seats until the next election but then would thereafter have to seek seats that correspond with their new stakeholder status.) Removal of the resigning Board member requires a majority of the attending Board members

Note that this section only creates a requirement for board members to notify the board for discussion and possible removal when they completely cease to be a Stakeholder. This section states that board members whose stakeholder category has shifted may serve out the remainder of their term in the seat to which they were elected or selected. It does not say that they must notify the board or the public as to how their stakeholder category has shifted, nor that they must provide documentation to demonstrate that they are still a stakeholder. The presumption is that these board members were elected by their community to represent their community and that the likelihood of them coming, in 2 short years, to have no significant ties to their community is too marginal to warrant periodic inspection of documentation.

Board members are unpaid volunteers serving on a merely advisory board to better their community; while I think the public has an interest in knowing where mayors, congress members and other career public figures live, I don't believe membership on our board should be available only to those who are able to subject every aspect of their personal lives to public scrutiny. I think our council is or would be all the better for including people fleeing violence or domestic abuse, undocumented immigrants, and people experiencing homelessness who would be placed in fear, danger or excluded by such demands for public disclosure.

I apologize to the grievance committee and board to see their time wasted by such a frivolous complaint, but I hope you all appreciate the principles of inclusivity that I am trying to protect by not simply acquiescing to Mrs. Chapman's demands, furnishing her with documentation of my present claims to stakeholdership, and requiring that each board member publicly reaffirm that they meet to requirements of the seat to which they were elected (or else presumably be subject to Mrs. Chapman's next inquiry and grievance).

I would suggest that the grievance committee and then board consider the following questions which this grievance raises:

- 1) Given the multitude of ways in which one can have a substantial and ongoing participation within a community, is any evidence that a board member's prior basis for affirming stakeholdership is no longer active sufficient to prove or even create a presumption that the board member in question is no longer a stakeholder in any other way?
- 2) Are board members required by the Council's bylaws to reaffirm or document their stakeholdership in the middle of serving out their term?

If you answer both questions with a "no," then I would suggest that you find this grievance presents no proof that either the Board or its officers have violated procedures to which it is bound and recommend that this grievance be resolved through no further board action than simply declaring it "considered and resolved."

Best regards,
Michael D. Skiles, Ph.D.
President, North Westwood NC

Grievance and Communications with the board relative to Grievance:

Dear fellow board members,

Sorry to have to email you again about this!

Lisa Chapman has asked that I clarify that this is not a grievance received by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and that, accordingly, the council's bylaws direct how the grievance is to be addressed, rather than Section 22.818, Article 3 of Chapter 28 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code.

Our council's bylaws dictate the following more lengthy process:

- A. Any grievance by a Stakeholder must be submitted in writing to the Board who shall cause the matter to be placed on the agenda for the next regular Council meeting.
- B. At that meeting, the Board shall refer the matter to an Ad Hoc Grievance Panel comprised of three (3) Stakeholders randomly selected by the Board from a list of Stakeholders who have expressed an interest in serving from time-to-time on such a panel.
- C. Within two (2) weeks of the panel's selection, the Board shall coordinate a time and place for the panel to meet with the person(s) submitting a grievance to discuss ways in which the dispute may be resolved.
- D. Within two (2) weeks following such meeting, a member of the panel shall prepare a written report to be forwarded by the Secretary to the Board outlining the panel's collective recommendations for resolving the grievance. The Board may receive a copy of the panel's report and recommendations prior to a Board meeting, but, in accordance with the Brown Act, the matter shall not be discussed among the Board members until it is heard publicly at the next regular Council meeting.
- E. This grievance process is intended to address matters involving procedural disputes, such as the Board's failure to comply with Board Rules or these Bylaws. It is not intended to apply to Stakeholders who merely disagree with a position or action taken by the Board at one of its meetings, which grievances may be aired publicly at Council meetings.
- F. Board members are not permitted to file a grievance against another Board member or against the Council.

To implement these bylaws, I recommend that the outreach committee begin outreach to develop a list of Stakeholders willing to be randomly selected to serve on an Ad Hoc Grievance Panel. All North Westwood stakeholders are eligible and should be interested not in hearing this particular grievance but any grievance that may arise against our council this term. Then the board can consider appointing a randomly selected Ad Hoc Grievance Panel at our August 5th meeting and then our council will consider the panel's report and recommendations at our September 2nd meeting (or October 7th meeting if they take their maximum allotted time).

Best,
Michael

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 2:47 PM Lisa Chapman <lchapmangabriel@gmail.com> wrote:
Michael,

This is not a grievance received by the department, it is a grievance sent by a stakeholder. That means you must follow your own by-laws in dealing with the grievance.

The paragraph regarding “certified grievance” does not apply here.

Please correct that statement with your board.

Thanks,
Lisa

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 2:28 PM Michael Skiles <northwestwoodcouncil@gmail.com> wrote:
Dear fellow board members,

Lisa Chapman has requested that I share this correspondence containing her grievance with our council with you. I'm bcc'ing you on this communication from the public to prevent a reply-all that might lead to a discussion in violation of the Brown Act. It is also out of respect for the Brown Act that I must abstain from any discussion of the merits of this grievance or the allegations against myself contained therein.

Pursuant to our council's bylaws, I will place this grievance at our council's next regular meeting, which is currently scheduled for August 5th.

According to Section #: Section 22.818, Article 3 of Chapter 28 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code, after receiving a certified Grievance from the Department, a Neighborhood Council must, at its next regular or special meeting, but not more than 60 calendar days from the communication from the Department, take one of the following actions: (A) Consider the Grievance in accordance with the grievance process outlined in the Neighborhood Council's bylaws and issue a decision to sustain and cure or reject the Grievance in whole or in part; or (B) Waive consideration of the Grievance and request the Department to forward the Grievance directly to the Regional Grievance Panel for consideration.

Also, since she requests that all of you publicly reaffirm your stakeholdership as well, I want to be clear that in passing on this communication I am not requesting or implying that you are otherwise required to reaffirm or prove your stakeholdership. But such a remedy may be considered by our council should it choose to "sustain and cure" the grievance.

Best regards,
Michael Skiles

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Lisa Chapman** <lchapmangabriel@gmail.com>

Date: Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 11:20 AM
Subject: Re: Grievance Matter
To: Michael Skiles <northwestwoodcouncil@gmail.com>
Cc: Gibson Nyambura <gibson.nyambura@lacity.org>

Michael,

I will research when i get home. Please send this to your entire board now, cc me, and make sure it is on your agenda for next month.

Thanks,
Lisa

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 11:18 AM Michael Skiles <northwestwoodcouncil@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi Lisa,

I've also checked with our Vice President, Zahra, and our Secretary, Grayson, and none of them received your email. Are you sure you sent it to anyone and, if so, to whom did you send it? Maybe you accidentally just saved a draft and didn't send?

Best,
Michael

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 11:06 AM Lisa Chapman <lichapmangabriel@gmail.com> wrote:
Please send this to your entire board now, and cc me.

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 10:59 AM Lisa Chapman <lichapmangabriel@gmail.com> wrote:
Michael,

It was sent to you and to your entire board weeks ago.

You have got to be kidding me.....

I have the sent email.

Lisa

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 10:57 AM Michael Skiles <northwestwoodcouncil@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi Lisa,

I'm not sure who you sent the previous email to, but this is my first time seeing it so it does not seem to have been sent to me. At any rate, the agenda for tomorrow's meeting already went out and it is too late to amend, but I shall be happy to place this matter on our next meeting's agenda.

Best regards,
Michael Skiles

On Tue, Jun 30, 2020 at 10:48 AM Lisa Chapman <lchapmangabriel@gmail.com> wrote:
Why is this grievance matter not on your agenda for tomorrow night's meeting? Per your by-laws, it is required to be.

I would like an answer ASAP.

Lisa

On Tue, Jun 23, 2020 at 10:20 PM Lisa Chapman <lchapmangabriel@gmail.com> wrote:
Dear North Westwood Neighborhood Council Board Members,

I am a stakeholder within your NC boundaries. My husband and I own a store in Westwood Village, and I am employed at UCLA Health.

I wish to file a grievance with your council, per your by-law instructions.

Article XI: Grievance Process

“Any grievance by a stakeholder must be submitted in writing to the board who shall cause the matter to be placed on the agenda for the next regular council meeting”

It has come to my attention that the president of your board, Michael Skiles, no longer meets the requirements of the renter seat which he holds. I understand that he has not met his renter status seat requirements for quite some time, when he moved from Westwood many months ago. I directly emailed Mr. Skiles months ago regarding this matter, and he did not return my email, nor answered my question on his seat status.

Mr. Skiles, to date, has not publicly declared this fact at any of your board meetings, which is required per your by-laws:

Article V Governing Board
Section 10

“Any member of the board who ceases to to be a stakeholder is required to submit his or her resignation to the board for discussion and action at a board meeting”

“However board members who remain stakeholders but whose stakeholder status has shifted may serve out the remainder of their term in the seat to which they were elected or selected”

Mr. Skiles is no longer a stakeholder in Westwood.

I understand that his on-line business now uses a business address located in a building owned by another of your board members, Mr. Alex Helmi. This just happened recently, after my email to Mr. Skiles questioning his seat status. In my opinion, this is similar to someone who uses someone else's address to get their child into a better school district.

Please place this grievance matter on your next meeting agenda, to be heard before the entire board for discussion and action. At this meeting, I am also requesting that each of your board members publicly declares that they still meet the requirements of their seat. If any of your board members are absent at this meeting, they will need to have their written statement read aloud publicly.

I have sent this via email to the addresses on your EmpowerLA page, so please make sure all of your board members are listed here as that list may not be up to date.

Thank you in advance for your diligent and quick response to this very important matter.

Best regards,
Lisa Chapman