

# Community input bypassed in Twitter CBA

➤ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Dec. 6 meeting, three days after the draft was finalized. Normally, after an initial discussion of a company's draft CBA, the panel holds a second meeting to hear public input.

There was some public comment on Dec. 6, as at all CAC meetings, but the panel scheduled another meeting for Dec. 20, to allow the community time to weigh in more fully. As the CAC discussed that date, Hilliard cautioned that she would be unable to attend, but didn't want to discourage others from meeting without her.

Over the course of the following 10 days, however, Hlad and Paul informed the city administrator's office and fellow CAC members that they could not make the Dec. 20 meeting after all. On Dec. 17, the city administrator's office announced the meeting was canceled. The committee's next regular meeting was scheduled for Jan. 3, but it, too, was canceled for lack of a quorum.

Three other CAC members, Eva Pirring, Nella Corpuz-Manuel and Jesus Perez, were asked collectively after May 2's meeting if they, too, had been unable to attend the planned Dec. 20 or Jan. 3 meetings. Although they seemed to struggle to understand the question, they ultimately confirmed that they had been busy.

The CAC finally convened on Jan. 17. Among the crowd at the hearing room expecting to weigh in on the Twitter CBA process were dozens wearing Market Street for the Masses T-shirts. To everyone's surprise, however, Barnes, citing a four-week window of opportunity for review that had run its course, announced he would be finalizing the Twitter CBA after the meeting, and it was no longer up for discussion. A CAC member asked if anyone from Twitter

was present. No one stepped forward.

"We had hoped to see more specificity on workforce development, job training and job placement, strengthening local hires of non-IT from the community," TNDC community organizer Hatty Lee told The Extra. "But there was very little, almost nothing on that, and it was really disappointing. We had voiced that in December, and not seeing any changes was pretty disappointing."

The legislation Barnes cited in finalizing the Twitter CBA also says that the city administrator may, at her sole discretion, extend this time.

Asked why this discretion was not exercised, Barnes said that it had been, that the four-week window had actually closed Jan. 3. "I think," he added, "in Twitter's case, people have had a lot of input through a lot of different forms. The CAC is one way to provide public input, but I would say for Twitter, everyone's known about it since 2010."

Even without a quorum, available CAC members could have assembled at the appointed times and taken note of public comment for inclusion in a future meeting, Barnes said, but they didn't pursue that option.

Hlad, development director at Hospitality House, said he resigned to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest after Twitter gave the group a \$10,000 grant. Hlad said he enjoyed serving on the CAC, as it serves an important role.

"I don't think it was perfect," he said about the work. "But it did give a voice."

But some of the 11 CAC members express frustration with having to evaluate the CBAs without any sense of how much each firm should be contributing to the community.

The committee members are kept in the dark about the amount of each tech firm's tax break, so when the

agreements come up they don't know if the benefits should amount to thousands of dollars or hundreds of thousands or more maybe.

"The information is a bit sparse," said Suzuki, executive director/architect at Asian Neighborhood Design.

Committee member Robert Marquez, director of S.F. Mental Health Clients' Rights Advocates, said that without knowing the value, it's impossible to know what a fair contribution is.

Paul, speaking with The Extra after the Jan. 17 meeting, said that the committee "was forbidden" to ask the value of either the tax break or the CBAs themselves. Hilliard, who is head of the Tenderloin CBD, told The Extra in a sep-

arate phone interview that "we asked Twitter multiple times" about the value of its tax break and CBA, and were told nothing.

"It's frustrating," she said, "for the committee and public because we can't really tell if the CBAs are offsetting their impact. We have no way of knowing what that is. We can't really gauge our effectiveness without those numbers."

That information is confidential under city ordinance and state law. ■

— Eric Louie, Geoff Link and Marjorie Beggs contributed to this report

## CBA era begins — firms pledge aid

➤ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

dered tax-break boundaries that have payrolls of \$1 million or more, which must sign a CBA, are: Twitter, Yammer, Zendesk, 21Tech, Zoosk, One Kings Lane.

The CBAs they entered into are formal contracts but unusually fluid and vague. The value of the benefits is not included in the agreements, though the assistance is expected to total around a third of what the tax break is worth to each company. And they state that the city expects only 80% of the benefits listed will be provided. Not a typical city contract.

And, each CBA states, the benefits are expected to become more "robust" in succeeding years, presumably as the companies prosper — and possibly because they will find new ways to help.

The supervisors formed an 11-member Citizen's Advisory Committee of people who live and/or work in the

neighborhood to frame the types of benefits needed to maintain the integrity of the hood, then review and put the community's stamp of approval on the CBAs when brought before them by the city administrator negotiated the agreements with the tech companies. The benefits framework was designed based on a series of community meetings where residents, nonprofits and others categorized the needs.

But the CAC members were kept in the dark about the amount of the tax break or given any way to measure the value of the benefits in these contracts without a bottom line. Nor is there any enforcement mechanism in the documents. If the benefits aren't provided — then what?

These are strange agreements, indeed. The looseness could make them more valuable in the long run. It all depends on the tech companies. ■

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