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Neighborhood meetings ordered

By Rick Orlov
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Calling it part of his effort to boost community involvement, Mayor James Hahn issued an executive order Tuesday requiring city department heads to meet with neighborhood councils at least once every three months.

"General managers need to know what residents think about their city government," Hahn said. "I want them to hear directly from neighborhood councils so they can work on the community's priorities based on their needs.

"This is just one way that we are working to close the distance between City Hall and our neighborhoods."

Thirty-eight neighborhood councils have been certified so far, and Hahn has said he hopes to have more than 100 by next summer.

Aides said the plan is for general managers to meet as a group with a number of the panels or to call an area meeting to discuss issues.

Hahn has said he wants the neighborhood councils to play a role in evaluating the department heads' work as a way to include residents in decision making.

But Gerald Silver of the Homeowners of Encino questioned the value of the sessions.

"The fact of the matter is, anything the neighborhood councils do is advisory," Silver said. "Department heads have always been available to people who know how the system works.

"The bottom line is there has to be some sort of control over decisions, and that's what is lacking in the whole scheme. All this is a stalling tactic to make people think they have some power when they don't."

Hahn, however, has said he wants the neighborhood councils to play a role in decisions and plans to have them also involved in budget development. Also, he has set up a \$3 million fund to provide direct grants to the neighborhoods to fund local programs.

The mayor made the announcement at a downtown news conference where he was joined by his sister, Councilwoman Janice Hahn, one of the major advocates for neighborhood councils on the elected Charter Reform Commission.

"Who better than neighborhood councils to advise our general managers in the delivery of city services?" Councilwoman Hahn said. "The development of a city budget should begin with the priorities of our communities, as determined by our neighborhood councils."