

Mayor's Picnic Thanks Councils

By David Zahniser

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Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn congratulated the city's 37 neighborhood councils with a picnic outside City Hall on Monday, saying they extend well beyond the traditionally tiny circle of neighborhood activists.

Celebrating his first year in office, Hahn praised the work of neighborhood councils from San Pedro to Woodland Hills, and promised to give them more authority over budget decisions and performance evaluations of top city officials.

Nine neighborhood councils have been elected since October, including three in San Pedro and one each in Wilmington and Harbor City. In Westchester-Playa del Rey, an election is set for November.

Those elections, said Hahn, have involved the entire community, not just self-appointed heads of homeowner groups.

““A lot of the folks who are the homeowners' presidents are very threatened by neighborhood councils, because they see that there's another voice speaking up on behalf of neighborhoods, a voice that's really elected by the people in those neighborhoods,”” Hahn said.

““A lot of these homeowner presidents have been self-selected . . . and sometimes they speak only for themselves,”” he added.

San Pedro and Peninsula Homeowners Coalition president Noel Park defended homeowner leaders, saying they frequently raise important issues. Park, who also serves on the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council, said the mayor's aides were invited to the homeowners' coalition meetings to see how the elections work — but that they don't attend.

““(Homeowner activists) keep shining the light into the dark corners where city government doesn't want you to look,”” Park said. ““They raise impertinent questions like, ‘You said no net increase in emissions (at the Port of Los Angeles) but there is no plan.’ ””

Hahn has repeatedly argued that neighborhood councils will bring about a revolution at City Hall, forcing elected officials to hear the needs of each of the city's roughly 100 communities.

Monday's picnic was infused with old-fashioned symbolism, from hot dogs and pie to red, white and blue bunting. The event gave Hahn the opportunity to highlight areas where his administration has worked with neighborhood councils, from helping Coastal San Pedro secure funding for playground equipment to helping Glassell Park get a meeting with the Board of Public Works.

Hahn said he took legal action against Ahmanson Ranch, a massive residential development in Ventura County, after hearing from the West Hills Neighborhood Council.

Neighborhood council volunteers were also administered an oath, which called on them to represent themselves with ““dignity, integrity and pride”” and to ““encourage other points of view,

even when they differ from my own.’”

The Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council has thrown its support behind a waterfront promenade and improvements at 15th Street Elementary School. And since its election, the panel receives dozens of e-mails each week, said Andrea Adleman, a member of the Coastal San Pedro governing board.

““A wide range of community members are coming to us because they perceive that the neighborhood council can be an effective vehicle to link the neighborhood to city government and resolve quality-of-life issues,”” Adleman said.