

# Daily News

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## **Neighborhood council leaders hear from Hahn**

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With high hopes and common complaints, more than 700 self-described pioneers in local government gathered Saturday to learn how Los Angeles' new neighborhood councils can be even more effective in the future.

"All power comes from the people, and they are having an impact," Mayor James Hahn said after remarks at the second Congress of Neighborhoods at the Los Angeles Convention Center. "That doesn't mean we are going to agree on everything. There are going to be differences. But they are having their voices heard."

Hahn told the crowd, representing 66 certified neighborhood councils, that he planned to increase spending for them in his budget to be released in the next two weeks.

Under his plan, spending for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment would increase from \$4.2 million to \$5.2 million and direct funding for the councils would grow from \$2 million to \$3 million.

Other officials in attendance included Controller Laura Chick and City Council members Wendy Greuel, Tom LaBonge, Eric Garcetti, Dennis Zine and Ed Reyes.

Neighborhood councils were included in the new City Charter approved by voters to respond to complaints from residents that their concerns were not being addressed in a formal way.

Although the councils are advisory in nature, officials generally have agreed to follow their recommendations.

The groups also have united as a powerful force, such as when they blocked a proposed Los Angeles Police Department policy which would have banned responses to burglar alarms.

The action was delayed to allow a special task force to study the plan.

However, complaints about what needs to be done to create a neighborhood council remain.

For instance, Marjorie Shoemaker of Arleta attended the Saturday conference with hopes of having an election soon for her neighborhood council, more than a year after residents came together. "We just seem to be hung up in the bureaucracy, and it took forever to get to a point where we can have an election."

"There were some rough spots at the start," Roberto Gallegos of Pacoima said, "but I think we're being effective now."

Jim Leahy said Van Nuys residents are frustrated over what many see as the department blocking them from forming their neighborhood council.

"We had one bad election and now a lot of people think they're trying to tell us what to do rather than let us decide for ourselves."

Department general manager Greg Nelson acknowledged the difficulties for the start-up, but said his agency is responding better and he believes there will be 100 neighborhood councils certified by the end of the year.