

LOS ANGELES TIMES

## Mayor Hahn Hopes Teamwork Will Solve Residents' Problems

A new program is intended to get city departments to work together. Some City Council members fear they're left off the team.

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Mayor James K. Hahn kicked off last week by donning a hard hat, climbing into a cherry-picker lift and triumphantly removing a pair of moldy tennis shoes hanging from a utility line in Lincoln Heights.

The symbolic gesture, carefully scripted for television cameras, was intended to show that the mayor has heard secessionists loud and clear.

No longer will a pair of sneakers, which Hahn said symbolizes urban menace, be allowed to terrorize a neighborhood because a cumbersome bureaucracy can't figure out how to get them down.

And that's the least of it. In the coming months, in a program of changes dubbed Teamwork L.A., city services will be decentralized, while municipal departments will reportedly become more responsive to residents and to the mayor's office.

"What's new is the mayor's office wants to be heavily involved," Hahn said. "It's a profound change a fundamental restructuring of the way we do things."

Although that may delight some, there's some consternation in City Hall's fourth-floor City Council offices, where phones traditionally ring off the hook as residents call to request services.

"It seems like we were an afterthought in Teamwork L.A.," Councilwoman Janice Hahn, the mayor's sister, complained to her brother's office during a special meeting a few weeks ago. "We should be on your team, but we sort of weren't there when you ran through the gates."

She said her office has heard that officials are telling residents not to call the council office anymore, but to go straight to the mayor's office. If true, she said, that sounds like unnecessary competition between the mayor and the council.

When Public Works Department crews pile into their trucks to fix streets, Councilwoman Hahn wondered, will they take the priorities hammered out by the council office, or will they do what the mayor says?

Council members acknowledged that some of these problems are the natural growing pains involved with a new plan. Several also said that, in recent weeks, the mayor's office has been much more inclusive.

The mayor's staff, too, downplayed any friction with the City Council. It's not Hahn's intention to discourage people from calling the council, members said. But officials also made it clear that the days are over when council members were the only ones jumping to answer phone calls about scruffy abandoned sofas.

"This isn't a power grab by the mayor," said Deputy Mayor Doane Liu, who is spearheading Teamwork L.A. "But it is an opportunity to shake up City Hall.

"The priorities will still be in the same order," he added. "It's just that the mayor will have a lot more say in those priorities. Someone needs a citywide perspective, and that's going to be the mayor."

Although the changes were announced months ago and are only now starting to take effect, many were made possible by the 1999 City Charter reform, which gave the mayor more power over the bureaucracy, including the power to fire department heads without the council's approval.

Using this power, and borrowing ideas from Baltimore and other cities, Hahn's office is drawing on techniques both cutting-edge and mundane to streamline the bureaucracy and make it more accountable.

At the same time, the city plans to open seven "neighborhood city halls" this year and ship high-ranking staff members out of downtown to work in them. The idea is for residents to be able to take care of city business closer to home and feel more connected to the city.

A new phone line, 311, is designed to allow residents to handle problems with one call, from sewage spills to homework help. A computer and data-tracking system, similar to the Compstat program used in New York, will monitor the bureaucracy's performance on everything from the cleaning of portable toilets to the efficiency of trash hauling.

And, in what officials are calling an epiphany of common sense, staff members from different departments will meet to discuss problems that cross jurisdictions at the local level.

City Council members are also invited to those meetings, although some complained that they were not initially asked to attend.

At the first meeting, officials were finally able to solve the shoe problem.

It seems that the Police Department has long been concerned that the decaying footwear swinging above houses upsets residents, who fear that it signals gang violence or drug dealing. But the police were unable to climb up and get them down. When officials of the Department of

Water and Power learned of the concern, they gallantly offered to take care of it.

By the evening of March 10, the phones in the city's new 311 call center beneath City Hall rang with about 200 calls about shoes. (And the Department of Water and Power had started referring some calls to the Fire Department.)

On potholed Baldwin Street, where the mayor and his staff removed the pair of black tennis shoes that had been dangling for about a year, some residents were thrilled, while others were furious.

"This is stupid and idiotic," said Martha Adams, who lives a few houses from the shoes. Money should be spent on after-school programs for young people like her son, she said, who get into trouble because there is nothing for them to do.

Hahn acknowledged that cutting down shoes may not be the most pressing problem in most neighborhoods. But the shoes are a symbol of urban blight and, with the DWP out repairing lines anyway, the costs of taking them down are negligible. Because right now the focus of Teamwork L.A. is public safety and cleaning up neighborhoods, the shoes seemed a good example.

"What we're showing is a different way of doing things," the mayor said. "It's about bringing government closer to the people."

Of course, the City Council won't argue with that. In fact, many credit Councilman Tom LaBonge with dreaming up some of the framework in the first place.

"The concept of Teamwork L.A. -- we're 100% behind it," said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who happily embraces her nickname as the queen of potholes and abandoned cars. Council members, she said, just want to make sure they have a spot on the team.

There are plenty of requests to go around.

In Janice Hahn's office, for example, one staff member talked with more than 20,000 people last year. Many of the calls were about potholes and street sweeping, said administrative assistant Marge O'Brien. But she has also fielded questions about what kinds of herbs to plant, how to get help for a sick horse and how to load a washing machine.

Other constituents just wanted a kind ear and had no one else to call.