

Dear Editor:

Here's a challenge for the Northeast Observer: abandon sweeping and baseless criticisms of our city's new system of neighborhood councils, and focus instead on positive recommendations for its improvement.

Certainly it can be improved. Those who have studied similar systems in other cities have commented that it has taken the others seven or eight more years to get to where we're at now.

It was estimated that we'd have 10-15 neighborhood councils certified by June 30, 2002. In fact, we ended up with 37 thanks to the help of new mayor James Hahn, and the tireless work of a new and dedicated staff.

In the process of moving that fast, it's easy to find targets for criticism. I challenge the Observer to be specific in its complaints about the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

We've had 50 elections now, and nearly every one concluded with no problems or just minor ones. To demean the incredible work of the neighborhood council leaders who organized those elections is simply not fair to them. They deserve an apology.

I am, in fact, "guilty" of focusing on the "big picture" as you have charged. Of course, that's my job! I truly wish that I had more time to spend with the neighborhood councils, and that will happen when more of the citywide issues are resolved.

So I challenge the Observer to help us resolve those big picture problems. For example, we have some neighborhood councils that simply refuse to organize their first election despite being required to do so by their own rules. Believe it or not, the Greater Cypress Park Neighborhood Council has been headed by a handful of self-appointed leaders for over six months, and they have defiantly expressed no desire to have elections. So the good people of Cypress Park go unrepresented. I'm beginning to worry that Baghdad will have their election first.

If you truly want to help fundamentally reform city government, I challenge the Observer to recommend ways through neighborhood councils can help the mayor evaluate general managers such as me.

And finally, I challenge the editorial writers to be open and honest with their readers, and make a public disclosure whenever they have a personal conflict of interest regarding the subject about which they are writing. In this way, readers will know if the editors' opinions are colored in any way by their personal interests in, say, their own neighborhood council.

I am always available at gnelson@mailbox.lacity.org.

Greg Nelson
General Manger
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

