

Mayor to Dedicate 6 Neighborhood City Halls

The facilities will allow residents to obtain city licenses, building permits and municipal services without going downtown.

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Moving to fulfill a campaign promise to decentralize city government, Los Angeles Mayor James K. Hahn on Monday will dedicate six new neighborhood city halls that are intended to give residents easier access to municipal services.

Some of the buildings are existing municipal offices getting a new designation and an increase in city staff. Two will be new buildings, including the Marvin Braude Constituent Service Center in Van Nuys.

The network of city halls — there will be seven in all — will allow residents to obtain city licenses, secure building permits and request city services in person without having to make the trek downtown.

"The more you bring government closer to neighborhoods, the more effective and responsive it's going to be," Hahn said. City employees already working in outlying field offices will be supplemented by dozens of others transferred from downtown and satellite offices, Deputy Mayor Doane Liu said.

Most of the buildings will house representatives of key city departments, including Building and Safety, Planning, Public Works, Fire, Street Maintenance, Finance and Transportation. Hahn will also have an office in each building.

The mayor made decentralization of services a centerpiece of his successful bid against San Fernando Valley and Hollywood secession campaigns.

He formally presented the plan for neighborhood government centers last year at a time when some civic leaders proposed more dramatic changes, including breaking the city into boroughs, each with its own elected, decision-making body.

Many of those civic leaders said that the neighborhood city hall plan is a positive development, but that it will not dampen their enthusiasm for moving decision-making power, as well as services, out of the downtown municipal buildings.

"It's a positive step, but without having real decentralization of the power structure you have nothing but a bunch of buildings as symbols," said attorney Robert Scott, a former city planning commissioner.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who proposed last year that the city shift to a borough system, also praised the mayor's plan, but said she will continue to pursue more government reform. "It's definitely not the final answer," Greuel said. "But it's a step in the right direction."

Others, including Councilman Dennis Zine, said seven neighborhood city halls is not enough to provide convenient services to all areas. Zine wants the Valley to have four city halls rather than the two proposed by Hahn.

A similar concern was voiced by Robert Jimenez, president of the Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council, who said a proposal to open an East Los Angeles Neighborhood City Hall in Highland Park does not help residents of his neighborhood very much.

"That's kind of out of the way," he said. He also said the mayor should have consulted with neighborhood councils about the best locations for the new city halls.

Hahn, accompanied by Police Chief William J. Bratton and other city officials, will start their Monday tour at the Tujunga Municipal Building, which is being renovated to include office space and service counters for 10 to 15 city departments. The building at 7747 Foothill Blvd. will serve as the North Valley Neighborhood City Hall.

Other stops include:

- The new \$33-million Braude Center at 6262 Van Nuys Blvd.
- A city building at 1645 Corinth Ave. in West Los Angeles, where several recently vacated courtrooms are being renovated into offices and public counters.
- The Hollywood Community Center at 6501 Fountain Ave., which will serve as the Central Los Angeles Neighborhood City Hall.
- The Mark Ridley-Thomas Constituent Service Center at 8475 S. Vermont Ave., which is already staffed by many city departments and will serve as the South Los Angeles Neighborhood City Hall.
- The renovated Harbor Area Neighborhood City Hall at 638 S. Beacon St. in San Pedro.

Officials are still trying to buy a building to serve as the East Los Angeles facility. Hahn will meet with residents in Highland Park to announce the project.