

## Los Angeles Daily News

Model of inefficiency

Sunday, July 06, 2003 - Let's see whether we've got this straight:

Los Angeles residents pay city bureaucrats the handsomest wage and benefit packages in the nation in order to get the basic needs of urban life taken care of. But the system doesn't work.

So L.A. residents endow the nation's highest paid municipal elected officials, their 15 council members, with million-dollar staffs. That way, there will be someone to call who can get the bureaucrats to fill potholes, remove abandoned sofas, pick up the rubbish, and dispatch the police to deal with neighborhood problems.

But the system doesn't work.

So L.A. residents support the creation of neighborhood councils to serve as watchdogs for the service needs of their local communities. The councils, in turn, try to get the City Council staff to get the bureaucrats to do their jobs.

But the system doesn't work.

So the mayor creates a staff of officials to do what the City Council, neighborhood councils and the bureaucrats don't: Make sure the people of the city get the services for which they pay dearly.

But that doesn't work, either.

So the City Council's members and staffs, the members of the neighborhood councils and the mayor and his underlings squabble about who has the authority to get the bureaucrats to do their job.

It's a vicious cycle that goes round and round without anything really changing. But the cycle could stop if the city's leaders made a commitment to make L.A. the great city it could become.

They could start by fulfilling the promise of City Charter reform and empowering neighborhood councils to oversee services in their communities. That would free up millions of dollars by getting rid of all those council and mayoral staff members who now broker city services.

The next step would require a mayor with the guts to empower department heads and order them to clean out bureaucratic deadwood and get the job done -- or else.

Los Angeles city government as a model of efficiency -- what a difference it would make. Middle-class families might stop fleeing to the suburbs, businesses with good-paying jobs might come back to the city, neighborhoods might rejuvenate.

Why the public might be so happy, residents would stop grumbling about poor services and high taxes. They could take pride in knowing they have the best-paid city government in America, and that they're getting their money's worth.