

## **Hahn sales-tax push criticized**

Local councils say city leaders pressuring them

**By James Nash**

**Staff Writer**

**Wednesday, January 12, 2005** - The campaign by Mayor James Hahn and other Los Angeles officials to generate support for a May ballot measure to hike the sales tax has run into resistance from some leaders of advisory neighborhood councils who complain of heavy-handed tactics.

Police Chief William Bratton and Fire Chief William Bamattre, whose departments would benefit from the increased tax revenue, are addressing more than 100 neighborhood council members throughout Los Angeles this week to drum up support for the half-percent hike.

City officials see support from the neighborhood councils as critical to getting the measure on the ballot at the same time as the expected runoff in the mayoral race.

But some neighborhood council leaders said it's not advice that Hahn and other officials are seeking, but blind support. They said presentations at workshops are one-sided and a survey was biased because it did not have an option for opposing the tax entirely.

"The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment has essentially advocated a position that happens to be the centerpiece of the mayor's campaign," said Jim Alger, a neighborhood council leader from Porter Ranch.

"Unfortunately, I'm seeing a dangerous trend -- the city government says they want to do X, and then they come to the neighborhood councils and ask us to help them get there."

DONE General Manager Greg Nelson denied on Wednesday that his office has an agenda, noting that at the four neighborhood council workshops he attended on the tax measure, people expressed a range of opinions.

"We had a really good quality of exchanges and questions," Nelson said.

Last Friday, City Councilman Greig Smith sent Nelson a blistering letter in which Smith accused city officials of trying to manipulate neighborhood councils into supporting a sales-tax ballot measure.

In November, Smith supported a countywide sales tax measure that fell short of the two-thirds margin needed to pass. But he said Wednesday that he would oppose a city measure, accusing Hahn and Nelson of giving neighborhood councils a one-sided view of the issue rather than explaining ways to expand the Los Angeles Police Department without raising taxes.

"The mayor saw an opportunity to use neighborhood councils to his benefit," Smith said. "The mayor was definitely only presenting one side and I don't think that's an appropriate use of neighborhood councils."

Deputy Mayor Doane Liu said while Hahn advocates a May 17 city ballot measure to raise taxes to hire police, he isn't pushing neighborhood councils to reach the same conclusion.

"This is grass-roots-driven and really taken on by the neighborhood councils," Liu said. "DONE is not asking for support, but they're asking for input."

The last of the six forums is scheduled for today in Westchester. After that, the City Administrative Office will compile comments from the forums as well as responses on a three-question survey given to neighborhood council members.

City Administrative Officer William Fujioka said his office won't slant the report to support Hahn's position.

"My intent is to show all of the options -- not just focus on one -- and let the council and mayor choose."

Not all neighborhood council leaders are complaining. Brady Westwater, the normally outspoken leader of the Downtown Neighborhood Council, said he's happy that city officials chose to include members of the local panels in their deliberations on a possible tax measure.

"Since this is the first time they've done this, I'm not going to hold them to that high of a standard," Westwater said.