

**LOS ANGELES  
INDEPENDENT****NEWS**

## Help wanted

City begins search for point person on implementation of new charter

By P.R. McDonald

The search for someone willing to subject him or herself to a year of contentious community meetings and shameless political maneuvering has begun. It won't be an easy gig, but, according to Mayor Richard Riordan, "This is a terrific opportunity for a qualified candidate to break new territory on behalf of the city."

Cheers to the ambitious soul willing to take it on.

Last Tuesday, Riordan announced the immediate search for a general manager of the newly created Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. As the much-heralded cornerstone of the recently adopted City Charter, the department will oversee the implementation of neighborhood councils and try to connect a fairly disconnected citizenry with its city government. The task will be complex and possibly unwieldy, but the mayor and his people swear it will be the job of a lifetime.

"It's going to be a challenge," says spokeswoman Ashleigh Adams, "but the person can be a real innovator."

According to Adams, cities from across the nation will be watching Los Angeles' attempt to give its residents a better voice at City Hall. In theory, neighborhood councils, which will represent communities rather than City Council districts, look very promising. People from various backgrounds will serve on a council and advise City Council members on matters that directly affect their neighborhoods. Council members, as a result, will act more responsively to the needs of their constituents. It is the general manager's job to make sure this theory translates into practice.

The reason for the complexity and political maneuvering is the creation of an actual plan to pull it off, which will be another responsibility of the general manager. To formulate a Neighborhood Empowerment Plan, the general manager must meet with community groups, business organizations, homeowners' associations and the general public to seek their input for the rules and policies of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. It will be a period of time when people will be demanding more and seeking nothing less.

"We should ensure that renters are represented proportional to their numbers," says Roxana Tynan, an organizer for 13th District Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg. In Goldberg's district, Tynan notes, renters make up 80 percent of the population. Many of these renters are poor and immigrants, and Goldberg believes they should not be forgotten when it comes time to set the guidelines for selecting neighborhood council representatives.

Homeowners' associations don't want to be forgotten either. Hank Pinczower, president of the Hollywoodland Homeowners Association, worries neighborhood councils will create another level of bureaucracy that will diminish the voice of homeowners.

And business people will want some say as well. In fact, business people may have the most influence if they live in one neighborhood and own businesses in several others. According to the City Charter, "neighborhood council membership will be open to everyone who lives, works or owns property in the area." This broad definition will surely cause some anxious moments for the general manager at one of those community meetings.

"It's going to be a very critical position," says George Kieffer, former chair of the Appointed Charter Reform Commission, "[requiring] somebody who has a strong backbone and who can deal with people." Kieffer's description of an effective general manager is repeated by anyone concerned about the implementation of neighborhood councils.

In a press release, the mayor emphasizes "strong leadership skills" over any other quality, which takes care of the "backbone" part. Tynan and Bennett Kayser, a former member of the Elected Charter Reform Commission, stress a person who is a "strong community organizer," which shores up the "people" end.

Fifth District Councilman Mike Feuer, however, adds "great organizational skills," "the ability to inspire people," "the willingness to take risks," "the ability to turn nothing into something" and a "sensitivity to community needs." It sounds a little superhuman, but Feuer claims, "It's the same that's expected from a councilperson." Riordan is conducting a nationwide search to find this people-friendly, strong-willed, wide-shouldered diplomat.

Even though the mayor says it's a nationwide search, someone with an acute knowledge of present day Los Angeles will be the leading candidate for general manager. In other words, a true blue Angeleno will probably get the job. Kayser already suggests Greg Nelson, who works intensely on the neighborhood council issue as chief of staff for Councilman Joel Wachs. Riordan may have someone in mind, but his office isn't telling. Feuer can't say at this point.

In addition to strong leadership skills and an all-around good disposition, the general manager must evaluate, delegate and administer the work of department staff, inspire that staff and reconcile competing interests; i.e. the entire political and civic structure of Los Angeles.

It's an incredibly formidable undertaking, but it'll pay somewhere between \$99,786 and \$149,689 per year.

Whoever wins the job should also ask for a year's worth of extra strength Tylenol and a weekend getaway in some remote desert town where the cellular phone is completely out of reach. Even a trailblazer needs proper rest and relaxation, and he or she will need it.

[Back to News Index](#) | [Back to Home Page](#)