

Mayor Signs Law Creating Department of Neighborhood Empowerment  
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LOS ANGELES (CNS) - Declaring ``the beginning of a new era" in Los Angeles city government, Mayor Richard Riordan today signed into law an ordinance creating a department to oversee a system of neighborhood advisory councils.

``Angelenos from all corners of our city will have a direct way to get involved in city government," Riordan said. ``For the first time, Angelenos will have a way to hold their elected officials accountable and to have their voices heard."

City Councilman Joel Wachs joined the mayor in the ceremonial signing of the ordinance establishing the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

The ordinance, which was called for in the new city charter approved by voters June 8, was passed unanimously by the City Council earlier this week.

Members of a seven-member commission to set policy for the department will be named within the next several days, Riordan said.

The search for a general manager is under way, and candidates are expected to be identified later this summer, the mayor said.

Wachs, who along with Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas was instrumental in drafting the ordinance, said the neighborhood councils themselves should be up and running in about 18 months.

The commission will have a year to come up with an implementation plan, he said, and then the council will have six months to approve the plan.

Los Angeles would become the biggest city in the nation to have such a network. Members of the groups will choose their own neighborhood boundaries and their own leader to represent them at City Hall.

``It's my sincere belief that the signing of this ordinance today represents the single most significant reform in our city charter," Wachs said.

Evelyn Stern, past president and board member of the Brentwood Homeowners Association, was one of more than 50 supporters of the charter on hand at the ceremonial signing.

She believes the new system will give residents more control over concerns such as overdevelopment and traffic.

``These are issues where local control makes a difference, because we're the ones that have to live with the consequences of those decisions," she said.

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