

Neighborhood Councils

Council Panel Gives Preliminary Approval to Neighborhood Councils

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City News Service

LOS ANGELES (CNS) - A City Council panel today gave preliminary approval to an ordinance that would establish neighborhood councils around the city to advise council members on community needs.

The ordinance is based on language in the revised city charter on the June 8 ballot, and will come back before the Governmental Efficiency Committee for a final vote a week from Wednesday before being considered by the full council.

Even if the revised charter were to fail at the ballot box, the council could still set up the neighborhood councils by passing an ordinance.

The ordinance language spelled out today would ensure that every part of the city be included within areas covered by a neighborhood council, and the entire network of councils would be overseen by a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

That department would be controlled by a general manager to be hired by the mayor, and seven civilian commissioners from different parts of the city would be appointed by the mayor with the council's approval.

Office space and equipment would also be supplied by the department, with startup costs estimated at \$1.5 million, including salaries for department staff, and annual costs of about \$4 million.

Councilman Joel Wachs, who chairs the Governmental Efficiency panel, said it is important to spell out in the ordinance that all parts of the city will be able to participate.

"We cannot obligate people to participate," Wachs said, "but we can encourage those interested in participating to get involved."

Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, who set up a system of neighborhood councils in his district upon which the city's proposed system is modeled, said he was also concerned that "all neighborhood stakeholders" be ensured involvement.

Ridley-Thomas proposed that participation not be limited to those who work and live in the area, but also include participants in schools, churches and community groups in the neighborhoods.

It is still not clear how the members of the neighborhood councils would be selected or their boundaries marked, and some of those decisions could be left up to the neighborhoods themselves.

All three of the panel members, including Councilwoman Laura Chick, currently have some sort of neighborhood councils in their districts. But there is no across-the-board system to coordinate those groups.

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