

Empowerment agency backed  
By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer, Los Angeles Daily News  
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A reluctant and skeptical Los Angeles City Council gave preliminary approval Tuesday to one of the key proposals in the new City Charter, creation of a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

Although the vote was 13-1, it came only after testy personal exchanges as members questioned each other's political agendas in approving the department, which will create advisory neighborhood councils throughout the city over the next 18 months.

The new department and commission is to be given a year in which to develop its proposals on where and how ..... [text missing] .... Greg Nelson, has been actively researching different approaches to neighborhood councils for years.

"And, it would hurt me politically for Greg to leave when I would need him," Wachs said.

Councilman Hal Bernson also criticized Wachs for pushing the proposal when he had never dealt with neighborhood councils and also for pushing the council to vote on it Friday while Bernson was away on city business.

"I've been on this City Council for 20 years and have had neighborhood councils. He never has had one," Bernson said. "I find that kind of ironic."

The council's two newest members, Alex Padilla of the San Fernando Valley and Nick Pacheco of East Los Angeles, also drew a rebuke from Bernson when they said they would oppose significant changes in the proposal.

"You're new here and don't have the experience we have with this kind of thing," Bernson said. "There are things that need to be spelled out. This was brought to us in a hurry and I'm saying we need the time to deal with it."

But Padilla said the commission that will oversee the department should be given the opportunity to deal with the details.

Councilman Rudy Svorinich Jr. was absent and did not vote. Councilman Nate Holden, who cast the only dissenting vote, agreed with Bernson that the plan was moving too quickly.

"What we're doing is an example of legislators not understanding what is before

us," Holden said.

But other council members argued that approval of the measure would help restore faith with voters. The council came in for criticism after nine of its 15 members opposed the new City Charter, which voters approved in June.

"Today is the day to move forward," said Councilman Mike Feuer. "We have an opportunity to show right out of the box that this council not only will keep faith with voters on charter reform, but to take the symbolic first step of reconnecting with our constituents."

Councilwoman Laura Chick said the council would have an opportunity in the future to work on details of the neighborhood councils.

"I remind you this is a framework, an umbrella under which we are going to operate," Chick said. "Many of the specific rules and regulations will be worked out by the new commission and when a new general manager comes on board."