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Neighborhood Empowerment chief nominated

By Harrison Sheppard  
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LOS ANGELES - Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn announced Thursday that he has nominated a chief deputy to Councilman Joel Wachs to be the new general manager for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

Greg Nelson, on Wachs' staff for 26 years, will be appointed on an interim basis starting Tuesday, while awaiting City Council approval.

Wachs plans to leave his council position Oct. 1 to head the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York.

"No one I think has spent more time looking at the issue of neighborhood councils in City Hall than Greg Nelson over the past few years," Hahn said. "It's something he has become a real expert on, something he's passionate about."

Nelson and Wachs were the first to propose the concept of neighborhood councils, put forth when Wachs was running for mayor in 1993, and later approved in the new City Charter in 1999 as a way of giving a stronger voice to local communities.

The position is seen as especially critical now because the first applications to form neighborhood councils are due next month and the department has been criticized for its slow pace and lack of communication with communities.

The previous general manager, Rosalind Stewart, left the position in August without public explanation amid criticism of the department.

Nelson said one of his first priorities will be to simplify the neighborhood council application process that critics have said is complicated and bureaucratic.

"The main problem is that, as someone at a recent community meeting described it, it makes the IRS long form look like a playground," Nelson said.

Nelson, 55, grew up in the San Fernando Valley, and community leaders in Wachs' district, which includes the Valley, said Nelson was a good choice for the post. He lives in Chinatown, and has been working as a resident to form a council downtown.

