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## Citizens Respond to Charter Reform Ideas

■ Forum: Creating neighborhood councils and boosting the mayor's power spark the most discussion.

By JOE MOZINGO, Times Staff Writer

**I**n what was billed as the L.A. Constitutional Convention, the city's elected charter reform commission Saturday gave the public a chance to respond to its tentative decisions on restructuring city government, sparking heated debate on two key recommendations: increasing mayoral power and creating neighborhood councils.

Of the more than 200 people who came to the Los Angeles Convention Center, some complained that the commission's proposal to let the mayor fire department heads would hobble the City Council and discourage city administrators from speaking to the council and media for fear of losing their jobs.

"Is there any criteria with which a city manager can be removed?" asked one man. "Can the mayor just wake up and say, 'I no longer want the manager of Building and Safety?'"

Said one woman: "We elected the charter commission to give the people more power, not the mayor more power."

But numerous others sided with the commission, saying the system now creates a diffusion of responsibility that makes it impossible to follow the chain of command to determine who is accountable.

"I'm a business owner in Los Angeles, and I don't understand how you can have a person report to 16 individuals," Martha Diaz said, referring to the City Council and the mayor. "It's not about secrecy. It's about efficiency."

The commission said checks and balances would still prevent the type of corruption rife in cities when the current Los Angeles charter was adopted in 1924.

The panel said it would consider what it heard Saturday before putting the charter reform package on the ballot in June.

The commission also explained its call for 15 appointed councils and a Department of Neighborhoods, as well as its proposal to divide the city into at least five planning districts for land use issues.

Sonia Ransom, a real estate lawyer working on the redevelopment of Hollywood, said a neighborhood could stop growth crucial to the entire city over temporary issues such as traffic caused by construction.

"Community councils having land use authority would be a disaster," she said. "I think you need a centralized land use authority that has vision."

Others favored more councils with real political power. "I find the idea of a neighborhood council and the number 15 an oxymoron," said one man. "285,000 people does not a neighborhood make."