

OPINIONS

The more things change . . .

For charter reform it's business as usual, a disheartening outcome for those who believed in

I have carefully followed and participated in the charter reform debate over these many months in several capacities, as chair of both the United Chambers of Commerce's and the 12th District's charter reform committees and as a member of The Coalition.

After attending hours and hours of hearings, task forces and other meetings late into the night over these many months and repeatedly testifying on this most important issue, unfortunately I have concluded that as far as the San Fernando Valley is concerned, the charter commissioners (both appointed and elected) have abandoned us and the very premise on which the movement began: local empowerment.

The point was reform, to change Los Angeles from an amorphous mass in search of identity into a whole municipality of empowered communities. Instead, again, we are left with real power only in the downtown establishment. They will "allow" us "locals" to give our "advice" on how our own community should be run so long as they can continue to ignore it. More of the same.

This outcome is very disheartening to those of us who have sincerely tried to make charter reform work. Over many

LOCAL VIEW

By William F. Powers Jr.

months, wherever the commissions met, they heard the same thing: The people want elected community councils with real decision-making power, including local planning and land-use oversight. Some commissioners even heeded that — notably Paula Boland — and championed the cause.

Unfortunately, when push comes to shove, the votes of the lobbied and self-interested majority turned away from what the people want and need.

Politics as usual.

In recent weeks, it is acknowledged that the elected commission has heard a lot of testimony against elected community councils. A lot of it raised the specter of NIMBYism, refusal of a community to allow certain types of development. But they refused to analyze several mitigations that were suggested.

Indeed, the chairman of the elected Charter Reform Commission, Erwin Chemerinsky, drew an ideological line in the sand, declaring he'd absolutely oppose a charter with NIMBY-busting incentives

built in. The source of the anti-elected council testimony was also painfully clear: lobbying at its best by the mayor (who opposed elected councils, any real power in them and certainly any real budget for them, as he made crystal clear through his spokesmen and indeed to this writer's own ears) and by the Los Angeles Business Advisors, the elite 26 businessmen who want to continue to keep Los Angeles under their collective thumb.

Both did a thorough job of mobilizing their forces politically over the last few weeks of the debate. The shame is that their alignment of the already-empowered special interests was designed to absolutely assure that no meaningful reform occurred. Certainly, it never had anything to do with local empowerment.

To the contrary. It was dedicated from the get-go to seeing to it that the monied powerboat wasn't significantly rocked.

In the final analysis, what both commissions have done in recommending advisory commissions with no real power is to point out clearly what mattered to them. It was definitely not what was right and democratic, but rather once again what catered to our old friends' influence, money and power.

And don't be misled. The elected

commission's "participatory" model is just an advisory council wrapped up in a cuter name. Its allowing for putting an elected model on the ballot as an option is particularly deceptive. It would have no real power, no budget to speak of and nothing to do with planning or land use.

That would be left to mayor-appointed regional planning commissions (one for the Valley and four for the rest of the city). These folks would thus be beholden to the mayor, so if they crossed him they could be fired at any time and for any whimsical reason.

Most importantly, the area called the Valley, which represents 40 percent of Los Angeles, would only get planning representation equal to an area having 20 percent of the population.

Sound familiar? It's the same litany that gave birth to our nation, the same theme that led to the Boston Tea Party and more recently to the secession movement all over Los Angeles.

The current status of charter reform is a total travesty. Our commissioners (except those like Boland) have abrogated their responsibilities, catered to the lowest personal or special interest or both, motivated common denominators and presented us with a big nothing. That will be their

legacy.

The question is, What will be our cy? Should we settle for less than we deserve or go for the possibilities?

I, for one, believe that democracy and that we locals are perfectly capable of self-governance. Until and unless the charter reform commissioners get this through their heads and truly empower us, we will never have the communities we desperately seek. As I've told them times, their actions would either nourish or inflame the secession movement.

The commissions have made their choice. They have chosen to inflame the secession and with it kill charter reform. It's a suicide.

If we want better communities, the course is clear. Start over. Make new cities free of this yoke. They must let us down and ignored our needs will be nobody's fault but our own. We must get away with it.

Want to respond in print? Send your Editorial-Letters page on how to respond to the columnist directly to William F. Powers Jr. is a lawyer in Chatsworth. Write to him at 20933 Devon St. Suite 102, Chatsworth, CA 91311.