

## Here in Los Angeles

### Joint Conference Panelists Inch Toward Single Charter-Reform Plan

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The panel that is attempting to reconcile proposals from each of the city's two charter commissions chipped away at their differences Thursday, agreeing on provisions for advisory neighborhood council and a network of planning boards to be running aground on efforts to set a size for the City Council.

The Joint Conference Committee delegates from the two charter panels met over to this Thursday the question of how many members to assign the City Council and whether—and how—to give voters choice.

The issue proved to be one of the most contentious faced by the Elect-Charter Reform Commission in its deliberations over the summer, as business groups urged more than doubling the council size, and African American and Latino groups warned that any deviation from the current 15 districts could setback hard-won advances for minority representation.

The elected commission ultimately voted to propose a charter with 15 council members, but to simultaneously present voters with the option to expand to 25.

The appointed commission, some months earlier, decided to recommend a 21-member council.

Elected commission Chairman Erwin Chemerinsky and appointed commission Chairman George David Kieffer, who are steering the Joint Conference Committee by hammering out their own compromise and forwarding them to the joint panelist proposed a charter with 21 council members—plus an option for voters to instead stay with 15.

But neither chairman expressed enthusiasm for the compromise, and panelists wanted more time to consider the ramifications of playing with the numbers.

Elected Commission member Woody Fleming, who argued vociferously against expansion during his commission's deliberations, on Thursday expressed the belief of his Ninth District constituents that "the minorities once again...were going to get screwed." The issue was already addressed, Fleming said.

"Bringing this back to the elected commission is going to be very, very divisive," Fleming said.

Appointed commission member Joseph Mandel suggested that the two commissions' differing stances, and the vast difference in the intensity of emotions expressed during each panel's deliberations on the subject, may reflect the fact that his panel dealt with the question earlier in the process—before interest groups began to mobilize.

"Race never entered into the debate, neither explicitly or implicitly," Mandel said. The lack of a "mosaic of greater participation" in the discussion at the time might explain the divergent points of view, he said.

Fleming, though, suggested the difference in opinion might be due to the different ways the two commissions were selected. "You were appointed," Fleming told Mandel, "and you were appointed from the council people."

But tension over the issue was defused for a time with the decision to continue the discussion this week.

On neighborhood councils, the joint committee agreed to scrap an elected commission "alternative" that would have allowed voters to opt for elected decision-making councils concurrent with City Council districts. Instead, delegates opted to stick with the elected panel's primary proposal—self-selecting, advisory councils with membership open to businesses, community groups and non-citizen residents as well as qualified voters.

The five members of the appointed commission and their five elected counterparts paused to applaud Greg Nelson, the deputy to Councilman Joel Wachs who has been instrumental in pressing for, and working through the details of, neighborhood councils.

Members also agreed to a system of at least five geographic area planning commissions, each with five members drawn from the area, to make rulings on zoning appeals and other local land-use issues. A citywide planning commission would continue to hear citywide land-use issues. Questions regarding appeals from the area and citywide commissions were put over for further study.

The joint panel also decided to give up the education reforms adopted by the appointed commission—an increase in the number of school board members and an increase in their salaries—as well as those adopted by the elected commission—to make recall of elected school board members easier. Instead, the panel decided to retain the current charter's status quo on education.

The Joint Conference Committee has not yet considered the charter reform issue that has attracted the most attention from City Hall insiders—whether to accord the mayor unfettered power to fire a department general manager.

But copies of letters were distributed expressing support for mayor "fire-power" from two council members—Richard Alarcon and Richard Alatorre. Joel Wachs, in a Los Angeles Times opinion piece co-authored with Mayor Richard Riordan, also advocated keeping the City Council out of decisions to fire department chiefs.

The joint panel last month adopted compromise recommendations on the role of the city controller, a city finance department, governance of the Department of Public Works and procedures for redistricting. But none of those proposals, and

none of those adopted Thursday, are to be forwarded to either charter commission until the joint panel works through every area of difference.

Chemerinsky and Kieffer said they expect to complete the joint committee's work by Dec. 17, then forward a complete package of recommendations to each commission by the end of this month or early next month. The package would then have to be debated and adopted by each commission, perhaps with additional reconciliation compromises.

Charter observers generally agree that a single reform package is more likely to win voter approval in June than two or more proposals.

But Chemerinsky said that if it becomes clear there will be two charter measures, his commission reserves its right to reject the compromise measures now coming out of the Joint Conference Committee and instead return to their own proposals. The City Council must approve the appointed commission's product before it goes on the ballot.

Drafting is going forward, absent the compromise provisions, on the elected commission's charter. Chemerinsky said it should be ready for release in the middle of this month.

The appointed commission released its own draft on Nov. 17.