

# District councils measure proposed

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By Rick Orlov  
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Saying a system to create neighborhood councils is needed with or without charter reform, the Los Angeles City Council on Tuesday called for forming a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment to increase citizen involvement.

Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas said the city needs to move forward on creating the new department, called for in the charter reform proposal that will face voters June 8.

"Even without the charter reform, this is something we should be working on," said Ridley-Thomas, who has created neighborhood councils in his district that meet regularly in an Empowerment Congress.

"If this is approved by voters, we should be prepared to implement this as quickly as possible."

His proposal, adopted unanimously, calls for the city attorney to draft the legal language and other agencies to report back on the expected cost of creating the new department.

The charter proposal calls for such a department to develop guidelines for the creation of neighborhood councils of homeowners, tenants and merchants to make recommendations to the City Council.

The neighborhood councils would be self-selected, rather than appointed by a City Council member.

Even though they voted for the Ridley-Thomas motion, some council members questioned it.

"This is simply symbolic," said Councilman Nate Holden. "This is nothing more than feel-good legislation. We should wait until the voters have their chance to voice their opinion before we move ahead with this."

Councilman Hal Bernson also questioned the plan, saying he has had neighborhood councils in his district for nearly 15 years and believes each City Council member should determine what is needed in

"What I'm concerned about is these councils becoming politicized," Bernson said. "That's what could happen with self-selected councils."

But Councilwoman Laura Chick said a formal neighborhood council plan long has been needed.

"This is a way to get people more involved in government, to become advocates for their neighborhoods," Chick said. "This is the greatest opportunity for public discussion."