



LOS ANGELES

Lawmakers Vote to Move Forward on Creating Advisory Neighborhood Councils

By ROBERT GREENE
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The City Council voted to get a jump on charter reform yesterday by immediately setting in motion plans to implement a citywide system of advisory neighborhood councils.

City residents aren't due to consider a new charter until June 8, but Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas said there was no reason to wait on the neighborhood councils portion of the proposed template for city government.

"We have in fact arrived at consensus" on neighborhood councils for the city, Ridley-Thomas told the council. "When we have [so] conceived, there is no compelling reason for delay."

Under the motion, the council is to consider a series of ordinances that would in effect do many of the same things required by the new charter if it is approved at the ballot box.

As conceived in the so-called Unified Charter, the city would establish and fund an Office of Neighborhood

Empowerment, which would in turn be required to assist communities in establishing a network of advisory councils with self-identified boundaries and self-selected members. An appointed neighborhoods commission would oversee the department's activities.

The final criteria would be subject to City Council approval.

The council's Governmental Efficiency Committee is scheduled to begin hearings on the ordinances April 7—approximately a year after the same panel gave up a month-long quest to set up neighborhood councils.

The panel last year jettisoned its efforts in favor of parallel actions by the two charter reform commissions after the committee's three members failed to agree on a single vision for councils.

Ridley-Thomas had championed citywide versions of his highly acclaimed Eighth District Empowerment Congress, while committee Chairman Joel Wachs pressed for smaller councils that were more independent from City Hall and transcended district lines. Committee member Laura Chick wanted councils that were more directly tied to city agencies, which would reformat themselves to deliver services in response to neighborhood needs.

The committee was assisted in its work by consultant Xandra Kayden, the UCLA political science professor and League of Women Voters president who has since helped form a coalition of civic groups pressing for advisory councils.

A Wachs aide said things would turn out differently in the committee this time since the two charter commissions reached their own agreement on an approach to neighborhood councils, and the committee would follow it.

Kayden told the council yesterday that neighborhood councils have by far attracted the most interest in study groups on charter reform around the city.

"It is the most driving issue now to most of the voters," Kayden said, adding that even if the charter doesn't pass neighborhood councils will remain a crucial issue because of secession movements and citywide desire for a greater voice in City Hall.

City officials are to bring forth a cost estimate for proceeding, under an amendment by Councilman Rudy Svorinich Jr.