

# CHARTER WATCH

Published by the Public Service Providers of Los Angeles

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For the Week of April 5, 1999, Issue #74

## Elected Commission's Fund Pitch Falls on Deaf Ears

A request for additional funds by the Elected Charter Commission to the City Council originally made in November 1998 has been bottled up in City Hall. The original request for an additional \$350,000 was made by the Elected Commission's Chair Erwin Chemerinsky to fund staffing, rent, meetings and an education campaign. At stake is a Commission-sponsored public education campaign that proposes a series of community town hall meetings at which specific issue areas of the Charter would be discussed. In addition the Commission proposes to use the funds to digitize its archives.

The Commission said it needed the additional funds due to the Charter being placed on the June 3, 1999 municipal ballot, instead of the originally intended April 13 ballot. This request comes on top of the \$1.55 million already allocated to get them to April.

The request for funding is not even mentioned in the recommendations contained in a report submitted to the Council and Mayor from the CAO and CLA. The report cites concerns over the legal requirement for 'neutrality' in all presentations about the ballot measure in which public funds are expended. The City Attorney has cautioned the Commission that a public official who authorizes an unlawful expenditure may be held personally liable. The only legally permissible use of public funds in regards to a ballot measure is to disseminate information in response to a citizen request for information.

As for the Appointed Commission, in a letter to the CAO and CLA, Commission Chair George Kieffer expressed concern that the public would construe any commission-sponsored education campaign as campaigning by the public, regardless of its legality.

According to Elected Chair Chemerinsky, the Commission is entitled to the additional dollars as a voter approved Charter Commission under California law. He also pointed to the tremendous need for public education, citing the LA Times poll released this week showing widespread ignorance on the whole charter reform debate.

The Council has yet to schedule consideration of the request or the staff recommendation, but City Hall sources doubt that there are enough votes on the Council to grant the request.

## ATTENTION CLUB and ORGANIZATION LEADERS

We have had several requests for the comparison of the current Charter and the proposed Unified Charter which we ran in three parts. We have assembled the comparison onto one two-sided 8.5" by 14" Special Edition which can be duplicated and handed out to your organization. To request a free copy call Charter Watch at (213)895-4646.

## What's Going on Here?

In a surprise development Local 347 leader Julie Butcher and Mayor Riordan have announced their intentions to collaborate on an article on Charter Reform. The idea was the brainchild of Jackie Goldberg who said that on second reading the new Unified Charter was "A-OK."

This strange turn of events began when Commission Chairs Erwin Chemerinsky and George Kieffer expressed regrets over the Unified Charter, wishing that the two Commissions' separate charters were both on the ballot. Their declaration degenerated into "my charter is better than your charter" taunts being hurled back and forth.

At the same time Elected Commission Administrative Director Geoffrey Garfield and Staffer Steve Presberg headed back to New York to meet with Mayor Giuliani and Ex-City of LA CAO Keith Comrie to plot their next step in the New York-ization of the City.

Interestingly, homeowner leaders gathered and declared their support for the self-selected neighborhood councils. These self selected leaders say they hope to provide Council members with powerful advice.

In a related story, Valley secessionists withdrew their petitions to pull out of the city. In a statement issued by valley leaders, they said they are closing up shop because there is nothing really to secede from, concluding that their work is done.

...APRIL FOOLS!

## Editorial: *Neighborhood Councils*

By Yadi Hashemi

"To promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs, a citywide system of neighborhood councils, and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is created..." (Section 900, Purpose, The Unified Charter).

If there is anything new in the proposed charter, it is Article IX. The article consists of five pages and incorporates fourteen sections. It establishes the criteria for the formation of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and outlines the new department's responsibilities. It sets up a seven-member Board of Neighborhood Commissioners to be appointed and removed by the Mayor with City Council oversight. It calls for the hiring of a general manager with powers consistent with the civil service provisions. Article IX requires that the boundaries of neighborhood councils be defined by ordinance under the direction of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. The Department is to be set up one hundred twenty days after the passage of the new charter by the voters. Most significantly, the Article requires that within one year after the establishment of the department, a plan to form the neighborhood councils be submitted to the Mayor and the Council for approval. The neighborhood council membership will be open to anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the neighborhood council boundaries.

The success of Neighborhood Councils will depend on, more than anything else, the availability of resources. Their failure will be guaranteed if they become political machines for City Councilmembers. They can play a major role in improving delivery of services to the City's residents only if the City's work force is adequately financed. Neighborhood councils can also play a critical role in improving the ethnic and race relations in the City, by enhancing communication and cooperation among the diverse residents of Los Angeles.

Surveys of City residents have shown time and again what they expect from City government. People want potholes filled, trees trimmed, traffic problems addressed, and trash picked up on time. Liaisons from the Public Works, Transportation, and other City departments will need to attend neighborhood council meetings. There is no doubt that there would be more work generated because of neighborhood councils. If public expectations are not met, there will be more dissatisfaction with City Hall, fueling the flames of secession. It will be more difficult for public officials to ignore the deteriorating city infrastructure. Neighborhood councils can play a role in prioritizing residents requests for services, which can help departments do their work more efficiently. They will also be involved in the

review of the City's budget. Public safety and the residents' quality of life depend on much more than having an effective police force. The City's residents know this well. It is time to let their voices be heard through their neighborhood organizations.

Neighborhood councils can coordinate the work of local non-profit organizations. They can bring the resources of the public and private sectors together to solve community problems. Such neighborhood organizations already exist in the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota. They are called "District Councils" and have been very successful. The 13th District Council in Saint Paul receives roughly \$25,000 of seed funding from the City budget every year. The District Councils are 501(C)3 non-profit organizations that do their own fundraisers in addition to securing grants from the Federal government.

After two years of discussions, the Los Angeles City Council adopted a motion (introduced by Mark Ridley-Thomas, seconded by Joel Wachs) on March 24th of this year to establish the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. The approval of this motion prior to the approval of the proposed charter by the voters is a welcome sign. Without Article IX provisions, however, there is a danger that the new department will become a tool in the hands of public officials to further their own political ambitions. Even though this may be difficult to imagine in Los Angeles, one cannot help but be concerned!

The debate over the new charter and particularly neighborhood councils is becoming critical in the current City Council races. Some Councilmembers, such as Michael Feuer, are in the process of establishing advisory community councils. Influenced by the public debate, the community activists and organizers who support Madison Shockley for the 10th District Council seat have already formed the 10th District Neighborhood Assembly (DNA). The Coalition L.A. progressives consider the 10th DNA to be a prelude to the formation of neighborhood councils in the 10th District. Nate Holden has for the most rejected the idea. The City Council races promise to be exciting to watch, considering that run-off elections and charter reform will be on the same ballot in June, 1999.

### **Charter Watch is sponsored by: The Coalition of Public Service Providers**

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District Council 36

## MEETINGS

No meetings this week.