

## LOS ANGELES

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## Council Panel Again Takes Up Specifics of Neighborhood Councils

*By a MetNews Staff Writer*

The City Council's Governmental Efficiency Commission yesterday picked up where it left off nearly a year ago on discussing neighborhood councils and found itself with a familiar set of disagreements over the nature and role of the new community bodies.

But committee Chairman Joel Wachs and members Mark Ridley-Thomas and Laura Chick also faced a key difference from the abortive set of hearings last year: the pending charter reform proposal answered many of the most difficult questions.

"It's a very different climate and a very different ability to get something done," Wachs said of the new effort, although he acknowledged "we may have taken the long way to get there."

The committee met to help direct the city attorney on just how to draft laws creating a new Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and as many as a hundred new neighborhood councils. The Unified Charter proposal on the June ballot would mandate that such ordinances be drafted and a department established within 120 days of passage, but Ridley-Thomas persuaded his council colleagues to proceed immediately in the interest of getting a leg up on the process.

Members also agreed that the new department and councils—none of which actually requires charter authority to proceed—might be appropriate even if voters reject the larger reform package.

Chick has long urged that the new template for city governance focus on service delivery. The 40 or so city departments and agencies should be redeployed to the neighborhoods to focus on serving local constituents, she said; perhaps getting council members out of the business of running interference for residents trying to get answers from departments.

But Ridley-Thomas said he believed constituents would never be willing to stop relying on elected officials to help them navigate City Hall.

The relatively arcane differences in the philosophy of

neighborhood councils could have important implications for the way city lawyers draft the implementing ordinances.

For example, members are mulling whether to require that city staff be housed in seven or eight service centers around the city rather than City Hall, or whether they should instead plan to be parceled out among the 15 council districts—or 21 or 25, if voters opt to expand the council in June.

Officials from the city personnel, cultural affairs and others offices offered their thoughts on the subject yesterday. Wachs said he hoped future meetings would attract more Angelenos from outside City Hall.

A Wachs aide said the panel is considering a website to keep constituents informed. A group of USC graduate students has begun compiling a database on existing city groups, in order to keep them part of the new process.

Wachs said many other committee sessions are planned between now and June.