

CHARTER WATCH

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Los Angeles Charter Convention Held

The Los Angeles Constitutional Convention, a milestone in the Elected Commission's march into charter history, began augustly Saturday morning, November 8th, with the presentation of colors by high school students in military uniform.

Held at the L.A. Convention Center in the shadows of the rapidly rising Staples Center, this "mother of all charter meetings" was attended by 250 - 300 citizens and all three city-wide elected officials. High mucky-mucks, mudslingers, and assorted muckrakers were also spotted, mostly working the lobby, where business cards were furiously exchanged.

"No single person is more responsible for charter reform than Richard Riordan," Chair Erwin Chemerinsky beamed, as he introduced the Mayor.

"The old charter has grown to over 700 pages and is hardly a recipe for good government," Riordan exclaimed. "It results in confusion and diffusion of power and accountability."

City Attorney James Hahn then spoke resolutely of how a strong unified city created itself out of a barren desert, and went on to create such monumental feats as World Port L.A. and LAX.

"I'm stating that I'm here to stand up for L.A.," he went on to declare unabashedly.

The last of the three to speak, Controller Rick Tuttle, cited the expected enormous local population increases as a major reason to make governing systems more efficient.

With the completion of the prerequisite political positioning performances, it was time for the common folk. Dividing the Charter into four general areas of interest, panels consisting of several commission members first gave a brief intro as to what had been tentatively decided, and then took public comment.

Allocation of Power

CAO Keith Comrie quickly weighed in that having Department Managers able to be removed by the Mayor would muffle Managers and decrease departmental effectiveness. Others disagreed with this, asserting that to be accountable to 16 Council people was more befitting to a small nonprofit than a major city.

Ever-resplendent gadfly John Walsh was far more colorful in his expression of displeasure over what he

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Elected Commission Meets in Shadow of Charter Convention

The Elected Charter Commission's first post-convention gathering took place once again in its favorite conference room deep in the bowels of the DWP's downtown headquarters. The November 9th meeting commenced with the issue of increasing the Commission's own budget by \$350,000 in order to compensate for its recommendations appearing on the June ballot instead of in April as they had originally expected.

The measure passed, but not before taking a broadside from John Walsh, who, perhaps buoyed by his verbal duel with Mayor Riordan at the convention, immediately launched into high drama. He announced that he had requested an audit of the Commission by CAO Keith Comrie and added for good measure, "Ringmaster Riordan's Charter Convention Circus was a big fizzle."

That old warhorse of issues, neighborhood councils, was next on the agenda, with City Councilman Joel Wachs as guest visitor. Taking the podium amid scattered applause, he spoke in favor of neighborhood elected councils, "As

long as they don't interfere with the participatory system."

Other public input included tidbits regarding the convention.

"The L.A. Times and Arco did whatever they could to minimize participation," said John Shaughnessy. "This whole thing is over budget and a mess. Erwin (Chemerinsky), maybe you should resign like Gingrich did," he continued. The blushing Chairman smiled broadly and seemed fairly interested in the idea, which was probably not the response that Shaughnessy had hoped for.

The first of the specifics dealt with upon the completion of public input was the length of terms for elected council officials. Bennett Kayser blasted through the Glushon-led arguments favoring longer terms by stating, "This is a classic example of the Commission not listening to the people, who have repeatedly called for two-year terms. The motion for two year terms, with a three term limit, passed 9-2.

A motion to have participatory and elected council posi-

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Charter Convention...

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perceived as a power grab by the Mayor. Citing "back east corruption" and a closed door Commission breakfast with the Mayor that had occurred just three hours earlier, he described the whole adventure as "Tammany Hall with palm trees", much to the delight of many in the slowly awakening audience.

This prompted a Riordan encore, wherein he returned to the podium and reiterated his need for sufficient authority to perform his duties, ending with the closing words, "People expect the Mayor to run the city."

Delivery of City Services

"We have so many potholes that my car's out of alignment. Kenny Hahn is gone now and I know he's in heaven, but we still need services", a senior stated with a soulful flourish.

Numerous other citizens stepped forward to complain of poor services in their lower income neighborhoods, causing Riordan to once again step forward and advocate that giving his office more authority over department heads would avoid the "diffusion of power" within the city.

Budget and Finance

Concerns continued to be voiced from the audience that the Elected Commission was heading things towards a "concentration of financial power to the Mayor." Others pointed to Orange County's recent bankruptcy as an omen of what could happen without proper checks and balances. A representative from the League of Women Voters weighed in their support for keeping the power to hire and fire the CAO in the hands of the City Council.

The CRA also took a few broadsides, with one individual suggesting that way to reign them in would be to have the City Council declare themselves to be the CRA of the city.

City Council and Neighborhood Councils

With Paula Boland absent from the panel, the remaining Commission members faced a feisty flock of audience comments, some of which evoked references to Tom Hayden, crooked ex-Mayor Frank Shaw, and even Jesse "The Body" Ventura.

With some calling for more democracy through increased City Council size and others stating that increasing City Council size only weakens the influence of any individual City Council member, it seemed that the level of argument on this and the day's other issues in some ways never advanced past the tinkering and finger pointing stage.

Elected Commission...

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tions unpaid passed by the same margin.

The next discussion, regarding the granting of discretionary funds for councils, was highlighted by concerns that councils would hire city employees for short stints, thereby moving numerous city employees to part time status. Several procedural moves and no small amount of hand wringing and haranguing ensued, capped off by Chemerinsky's observation that, "I think everything is spinning around tonight." Eventually a majority came to realize that they really had no grasp of the City's complex expenditures and just whose ox would be gored by raiding city service budgets to find allowance money for their new "councilettes." The motion was tabled 6-5.

A motion that the City Council should regulate election donations to councils was deferred.

The motion that the City Council may assign additional authority or decision-making powers to councils on matters of local concern came next. Bill Weinburger observed that this provision was unlikely to be abused.

"I don't think that we have to worry about this," said Wienberger. "This is, after all, about the City Council giving up powers," he wryly noted. The motion passed unanimously.

A final landmine motion awaited - should there be both elected and participatory councils? Concerns voiced included the cost, and the adding of a further layer of government bureaucracy ("Now they'll have another layer of government to complain about"). But the greatest wailing and gnashing of teeth was heard over how confusing it would be, with Dennis Zine cracking, "If we can't figure this out, how can the voters possibly figure this out?" The discussion was stopped due to the late hour.

Public comment was also started on the issue of city contracting. Several speakers outlined that rapid changes are taking place in the contracting and procurement arena. This involves large firms that bundle small contracts together and then subcontract. This trend helps the 20% of area companies that are large but puts the 80% that are small at a considerable disadvantage.

MEETINGS

The Elected Commission holds its regular Monday meeting on November 16 at 6pm at DWP, 111 N. Hope St. Issues covered will include contracts and procurement and civil service.

The Appointed Commission will meet Wednesday, November 18 at 1 pm at DWP.