

Land-use authority rejected

Reform panel kills power for councils

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Despite pressure from San Fernando Valley-based community groups, Los Angeles' elected Charter Reform Commission voted Monday against giving elected neighborhood councils any decision-making power over land-use matters.

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Only three of the commissioners voted for decision-making powers, while nine opposed the proposal.

The commission voted instead to create at least five district planning commissions, appointed by the mayor, to make appealable decisions on land-use issues. For instance, the Valley, with about one-third of the city's population, would have one commission for planning issues.

It was the fourth time in a month

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that the charter panel rejected the idea of letting neighborhood councils decide whether liquor stores, pawn shops, adult bookstores and other controversial planning projects should be given permits in their communities. Some observers say the issue probably is dead.

Commission Chairman Erwin Chemerinsky, who originally favored the strong powers, said he decided in the end that he had objections to the proposal based on both political grounds and substance.

"I've been persuaded that it is better that they have an advisory role on land-use issues," Chemerinsky said. "I worry politically about taking on both business and labor, which have opposed decision-making powers."

Chemerinsky said he was moved

by the substantial concerns of downtown business and labor leaders, who fear neighborhood councils with strong powers could block development that is important to the city's economic vitality.

"I do worry about it not resulting in a balanced consideration of development," Chemerinsky said.

The commission voted last week to offer voters a main charter with neighborhood councils that are locally selected, possibly at community caucuses, to have decision-making power over a small portion of the city budget but only advisory roles on planning matters.

The charter panel also had voted to offer voters a second ballot measure allowing voters the chance to make the neighborhood councils elected bodies. An additional ballot measure approved previously by the commission would let voters choose between 15 and 25 council districts.

Monday's vote means the added ballot measure with elected neighborhood councils, like the main charter, would not provide decision-making power over land-use issues.

Commissioner Bennett Kayser argued unsuccessfully in favor of giving the neighborhood councils limited decision-making powers over land-use matters that most concern neighborhoods — those over controversial projects such as pawn shops, liquor stores and adult bookstores.

Those issues most affect the quality of life in each neighborhood and therefore should be left to the neighborhoods to decide, Kayser argued.

The decision not to give neighborhood councils decision-making power on land-use issues has angered many Valley homeowner and business leaders, who say

charter reform is dead without meaningful empowerment of neighborhoods.

The commission also voted Monday to aim at putting its recommendations on the ballot in June 1999 rather than April, to give the panel more time to refine its proposals and try to reach consensus with the appointed Charter Reform Commission on a combined ballot measure.

"We just need extra time," Chemerinsky said, adding that the Jan. 8 deadline for submitting a charter for the April ballot is too soon to thoroughly evaluate a new charter.

In addition, Chemerinsky said that if his panel's charter is approved in April and the appointed charter panel's recommendations are approved by voters in June, state law means the appointed panel's recommendations supercede any previously approved charter changes.