

11/07 NEWS: Initiative drive weighed for empowered councils

By Patrick McGreevy, Daily News

Leading supporters of creating strong neighborhood councils in Los Angeles said Friday they are considering an initiative drive in the wake of two charter reform commissions' decisions to ask voters to approve only advisory councils.

A group of business, labor, political and homeowner leaders — called The Coalition — is scheduled to hold a news conference today at a citywide Constitutional Convention for the elected Charter Reform Commission. At their news conference, members of The Coalition will urge the elected charter panel to reconsider its recommendation for neighborhood councils having only advisory power over land use.

That recommendation for purely advisory councils is opposed by The Coalition, which includes state Sen. Tom Hayden, D-Los Angeles, and Richard Close, chairman of Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment, the secession study group, and president of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association.

The city's appointed charter commission also has recommended purely advisory councils.

Hayden is examining the feasibility of launching a petition drive to qualify an initiative for the citywide ballot that would amend the new charter by requiring the establishment of decision-making neighborhood councils, said Rocky Rushing, a spokesman for the lawmaker.

"We're looking into what signatures would be needed and by when," Rushing said. "Because, by God, if (the commissions) are not going to put anything meaningful on the ballot maybe we will."

Deputy City Clerk Joe Giles confirmed that Hayden's office had contacted him to get details on qualifying an initiative.

Giles said the petitioners would have to collect 61,170 signatures of registered voters in Los Angeles and turn them in 160 days before the election in which the initiative would appear.

Close, whose Valley VOTE group is just wrapping up a signature drive to trigger a study of cityhood for the San Fernando Valley, said an initiative drive on neighborhood empowerment may be warranted.

"That route may be the only way to accomplish our goal," Close said. "It's something to consider if the ways and means are there."

The news conference will be held outside the downtown Convention Center today, where the elected charter panel will take public testimony on its proposed charter beginning at 9 a.m.

Commission Chairman Erwin Chemerinsky said the panel's decision to aim for the June 1999 ballot instead of the April ballot means the commission will need more money from the City Council to continue operating.

Chemerinsky said the panel will meet Monday to consider asking the council to allocate an additional \$350,000 to the \$900,000 previously allocated by the City Council, but which will run out Dec. 31.

He said Mayor Richard Riordan has agreed to support the additional funds, which would bring the total city allocation to a level equal to the \$1.25 million given to the city's appointed Charter Reform Commission.

In a related matter, Riordan has appointed business attorney Richard M. Macias to a seat on the elected Charter Reform Commission vacated by Gloria Romero, who won election Tuesday to the state Assembly.

Riordan will also likely get a second appointment because Commissioner Marguerite Archie-Hudson has accepted a job on the East Coast. 11/7/98 5:24 AM