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## Charter Reform Vote Will Bolster Cityhood

■ Neighborhood councils decision makes clear that process won't benefit the Valley.

By RICHARD H. CLOSE

**W**hy did you vote for charter reform last year?  
Pick one:

- \* To shift power from the City Council to the mayor.
- \* To increase the size of the City Council from 15 to 25.
- \* To allow the mayor to fire department heads without City Council approval.
- \* None of the above.

Most Valley residents would answer "none of the above." However, the two charter reform commissions have focused most of their attention on items 1, 2 and 3.

Charter reform was offered by politicians to San Fernando Valley residents as an alternative to secession. We were told that charter reform would give residents and businesses a better local government, and examples such as Burbank and Glendale were cited.

The politicians told Valley residents and businesses not to support Valley cityhood but to give charter reform a chance. The most important element in charter reform was supposed to be locally elected neighborhood councils that would have decision making authority over land-use decisions in their community.

But a charter reform commission appointed and controlled by the City Council quickly decided that such community councils were unacceptable. This has generally been interpreted to mean that the neighborhood councils are unacceptable to City Council members who want to retain their power.

And just last Monday evening, the elected charter reform commission voted not to support such neighborhood councils. The councils were determined to be unacceptable to the downtown Los Angeles political structure, the mayor and the building trade unions.

Monday's vote against neighborhood councils may turn out to be the most important action taken to help Valley cityhood efforts. The public now realizes that charter reform will not accomplish its goals. Once this fact is acknowledged, then there is only one other option and that is to create the Valley as a separate city.

Who will benefit from the proposed charter reform? The winners are political interests who want to control the city of Los Angeles but want to live in cities such as

San Marino, and Beverly Hills. The only way they can control Los Angeles is by having a powerful mayor rather than a powerful City Council. Thus, they can put money into mayoral campaigns and elect one person who will have the power to control decisions throughout the city.

Labor unions want city power held by the City Council. They can elect a majority of the City Council members and, therefore, control all decisions in the city.

Where do Valley residents and businesses fit into this analysis? Nowhere. Charter reform is becoming a debate on who should have power: the mayor or the City Council.

Weren't we promised so much more? Remember the discussions about civil service reform and changing the city pension system? Neither commission is even discussing these important issues.

More residents and businesses are realizing that the only way we can reform the system is by establishing a separate Valley city. As a separate city, Valley elected officials could obtain money from Sacramento and Washington for programs and the money would stay in the Valley. Our sales tax dollars for rapid transit would stay in the Valley and not be used in other areas of the county.

We were promised a subway through the Valley. Then the Metropolitan Transportation Authority "ran out of money" after spending \$1.3 billion in Valley sales tax dollars. All we are receiving is a stub in North Hollywood.

Now that the public realizes that charter reform is not going to help the community or the Valley, the only option becomes Valley cityhood. The creation of the Valley as a separate city could be on the ballot in November 2000 or November 2002.

More than 184,000 Valley registered voters have signed petitions calling for a feasibility study by the Los Angeles County Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO. LAFCO will determine if the Valley could be economically viable as a separate city and whether the division could be done in a manner that would not adversely affect the remainder of the city.

If LAFCO determines that it is possible, the voters will decide. The failure of charter reform probably will be considered the No. 1 reason Valley cityhood succeeds.

Charter reform raised our expectations. Political reality now indicates that if you can't fight City Hall, you must change it and create a new one in the San Fernando Valley.

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