

# PUBLIC FORUM

## Secession emerging as best bet for reform

*For today's Public Forum, readers were asked to comment on the refusals by both Los Angeles charter reform commissions to endorse elected neighborhood councils with meaningful powers.*

Residents in the San Fernando Valley are disappointed to see the rapid deterioration of constructive ideas emanating from both the appointed and elected charter reform commissions.

What appears obvious at this stage is that meaningful charter reform, in order to make this city whole again, will not be on the ballot in 1999.

This sad realization leaves many of us in the city of Los Angeles with only one other alternative, and that is to support the study for San Fernando Valley cityhood. San Pedro and Eagle Rock have already begun their petition drives, and other communities in Los Angeles are not far behind.

We never expected realistic reform from the appointed commission, but we are truly disappointed to find how influential the special interests have been over the elected commission.

Now is the time to sign the petition for the study of Valley cityhood. If you haven't signed yet, contact Valley VOTE at (818) 501-5862.

— **Don Schultz**  
President  
Van Nuys Homeowners Association

It's not really a big surprise that the appointed commission turned thumbs down on allowing neighborhood councils to be elected by residents of the neighborhoods they will serve. After all, the appointed commissioners are beholden to a City Council that has no desire to give up any of its own powers to anyone.

The real surprise is that the elected commissioners caved in to the same pressures and turned their backs on the very platform they all ran on. But, hey, that's politics, isn't it?

Maybe the best way to handle neighborhood councils is to allow the creation of such organizations to be optional within the communities themselves, because there are probably at least a dozen neighborhoods in the city that are perfectly happy to leave things the way they are.

The charter should not force neighborhood councils into neighborhoods that don't want them. On the other

hand, they can be a tremendous tool for disgruntled communities that are desperate for a voice in their own destinies.

But first the commissions need to come up with a method of defining what a neighborhood really is. Probably the most sensible way is to leave this task to a vote of the residents themselves. After all, they live in the neighborhoods, and they are the real experts as to where their boundaries end and the next neighborhood begins.

Somebody eventually has to address that question, but so far neither commission seems willing to take on the task.

If the commissions are really serious about placing meaningful reform on the ballot, they should get their heads out of the sand and begin to decide how to best present the propositions that will get the most voters, and the most votes. I guess that's politics, too.

— **Susan Steele**  
President  
Citizens for Pride  
Chatsworth

In a letter to Public Forum dated April 14, I predicted that downtown's effort to kill Valley independence — supported by eight out of 10 Valley voters — by raising the possibility of elected neighborhood councils would not go far enough in giving Valley residents local control over the issues that affect them most. I predicted that Valley voters would reject neighborhood councils in favor of Valley independence.

Now, we will never know. As the Daily News correctly stated, the entrenched downtown power structure has killed meaningful neighborhood empowerment. No one should be surprised when this rigid reaction from the downtown power structure fuels efforts toward independence in the Valley; Eagle Rock, San Pedro and other areas of Los Angeles.

— **Steven G. Pearl**  
Encino

Instead of electing community councils and having a new layer of bureaucracy, just have each community, such as Van Nuys, Reseda and Encino, establish voluntary advisory councils consisting of homeowner associations, chambers of commerce and other civic groups.

As for secession, just consolidate all of Los Angeles County into a city-county and redivide it into boroughs. For example, the San Fernando Valley could be its own borough. Each borough would have

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### NBA lockout

#### PUBLIC FORUM TOPIC

If it hadn't been for the lockout, the National Basketball Association season would be well under way.

For the Public Forum for Saturday, Nov. 14, the Daily News invites readers to comment on the dispute between NBA players and owners as well as the general state of professional sports. Have the millionaires who own the teams and the athletes who play for them lost touch with the fans? Are ever-increasing ticket prices putting professional events beyond the reach of most working people? Is the labor dispute likely to generate increased interest in college basketball?

Letters on this subject must reach the Daily News no later than Wednesday, Nov. 11.

its own council and chief executive and receive its services from the city-county. This concept would bring local government closer to the people.

Other parts of the city-county could do the same.

— **Byron Fogel**  
Van Nuys

I have personally attended at least a dozen charter commission meetings and have talked myself hoarse about the very problem the commissions now face: that is, the very real likelihood that confused and disgusted voters will turn down both proposed charters because of two or three issues they don't like.

Nobody denies that both commissions have put in a lot of work and have come up with some pretty creative thoughts for the next century. But nobody with a lick of sense really believes that any new charter will automatically please everyone in the city.

I am convinced that the only way either commission will see any of its ideas become law is to divide the proposed charters into sections that can be voted on piecemeal.

It shouldn't be too difficult to put the noncontroversial sections together for one vote and to separate the touchy sections into individual ballot issues to be decided on their own merits. Then at least some of the ideas will be voted in, and the rest can be dealt with later.



Charter debate has turned into a struggle between City Hall and neighborhoods.

David Sprague/Daily News

## Panelist urges residents to spurn boycott

The 15 dedicated and noncompensated elected charter reform commissioners have devoted thousands of hours and attentively listened to hundreds of residents, business and labor leaders, elected officials and other citizens concerned with the provisions of a new charter for the city of Los Angeles.

At recent community charter reform meetings, large numbers of special interest representatives testified as to their preference for neighborhood councils. Some demanded elected, some supporter appointed, while others favored participatory neighborhood councils. After the debate, the commissioners compromised and decided to have Los Angeles voters choose between an elected or a participatory model. For the record, I have campaigned for and supported elected neighborhood councils since first elected to the Charter Reform Commission.

Since we enjoy the pleasure of a precise democratic government in our country, the compromise seemed to be the best solution for the volatile conflict between the many competing groups supporting their neighborhood council agendas.

Now I read that some of those special interest representatives who testified before our commission have encouraged the voters to boycott the elected charter reform convention being held today at the L.A. Convention Center.

What a pathetic reaction by so-called community leaders who fail to recognize that the elected charter reform commissioners are sincere in their difficult and tenuous task of charter reform. The worst thing they can do to their communities is boycott the event.

All commission decisions are tentative at this point and can be reconsidered and modified following the historic charter reform convention.

We have worked long and hard on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to give the dysfunctional government of Los Angeles back to the people who pay the exorbitant taxes and receive less than satisfactory services from the government of Los Angeles.

I urge all Valley and city residents to attend the charter convention and voice their concerns. Don't let the so-called special-interest representatives ruin charter reform for you, your family, your community and our troubled city.

— Dennis P. Zine

Elected Charter Reform Commission  
3rd Council District

Also, the new charter should absolutely include a provision that successor commissions will be elected every four years, during mayoral elections, to continue the process of fine-tuning the charter until we finally get it right.

If successor commissions are not automatically created by law, chances are that this city will never again have the opportunity to speak its mind about the way it is governed.

But with the prospect of secession only a heartbeat away, maybe it doesn't really matter at all.

— Walter N. Prince  
Northridge

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Secession, as wonderful as it may seem, isn't going to happen. The City Council and the over-the-hill gang will do everything and anything to stop it, along with any meaningful charter reform. They already have all the cards and can drag out the entire process so long that the movement will die of old age or just go broke.

Remember, a citywide vote is necessary. They also know that a secession vote in the Valley is a hard sell, so all they need to do is to go to the rest of the city and say, "If the Valley secedes, it will be bad for your children. The loss of revenue will force cuts in police, fire, park and recreation services. Is that what you want?"

On the other hand, if a vote approved the separation from downtown, we would still be at the mercy of the city. It owns the fire trucks, the police cars, the water and power distribution systems, and all the other city services that we would need from day one. The City Council would become the landlord and we the tenants. We couldn't even vote council members out of office.

In order to deal with the situation, I believe we need to join with San Pedro, Venice, Eagle Rock and any other community with the same interests and remove these people from office, either at election time or by recall.

Next, we could take a page from their book and require a citywide election for all council members. As it is now, they have no fear for their jobs and no respect for the electorate.

— Tom Montali  
Woodland Hills

### How to write to us

We welcome letters on all issues of public concern. All are subject to editing and condensation, and they can be published only with the writer's true name. Only the writer's home community, rather than full address, will be published. Letters must include the writer's complete home address and daytime telephone number for verification purposes.

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