

Joint City Charter Panel OKs Compromise Pact

■ **Government:** The unanimous vote is applauded by gallery, but two additional legislative hurdles await.

By JIM NEWTON
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A marathon round of negotiations, which one participant compared to "shuttle diplomacy," produced a major breakthrough Wednesday in the debate over modernizing Los Angeles' City Charter when the leaders of the dueling reform commissions unanimously approved a compromise package.

When the votes were tallied, members of the panel and the audience burst into applause, and USC law professor Erwin Chemerinsky, chairman of the elected commission, grinned broadly as he announced: "We have a charter."

Of course, in the world of charter reform, nothing is over until it's over, and two more votes have to occur to ratify Wednesday's action. The full elected commission meets Saturday to consider the package, and the City Council is expected to vote next week.

If the deal holds, and most observers now believe it will, it means that Los Angeles residents will have the chance to vote in June on a far-reaching reform package that would, among other things, strengthen the city's mayor, reorganize key city departments, create an ambitious new system for neighborhood representation, and open the way for a possible expansion of the City Council.

The deal came together when Mayor Richard Riordan agreed to yield on a handful of issues some City Council members view as important, and the council's representatives stopped insisting that the charter not take effect until after Riordan leaves office in 2001. On one or two other issues, minor tinkering with charter language went far enough to please both sides.

Those compromises were hard won, with the two sides and leaders of the charter commissions hammering away late into the night Tuesday and then again Wednesday morning.

Los Angeles City Atty. James Hahn also

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