



Elected Commission Unveils Proposal for Revamping of City Charter

(CNS)—An elected panel charged with revamping Los Angeles' circa-1925 city charter unveiled a draft proposal yesterday that includes giving voters a choice between a 15- or 25-member City Council.

Standing across from City Hall, Erwin Chemerinsky, who chairs the Elected Charter Reform Commission, said restoration of the earthquake-damaged building is a metaphor for the 138-page document aimed at revamping city government.

"Our charter is truly a bold, different vision for the 21st century," he said, amid the din of construction machinery.

The draft document also calls for setting up a network of neighborhood councils, which Chemerinsky stressed is necessary to make the city more "responsive"; a "living wage" provision; and establishment of a three-year term for the police department's inspector general.

The living wage provision—already a city ordinance championed by Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg—would mandate that firms with city contracts pay their employees a minimum of \$7.39 per hour with benefits such as health insurance and paid vacations.

Without offering benefits, city contractors would have to pay workers at least \$8.64 per hour.

The charter proposal recommends giving the mayor the power to exempt top city managers from civil service protections and eliminate the City Council's role in confirming their appointments.

The mayor, however, would need City Council approval to fire general managers, the top administrators who run city departments.

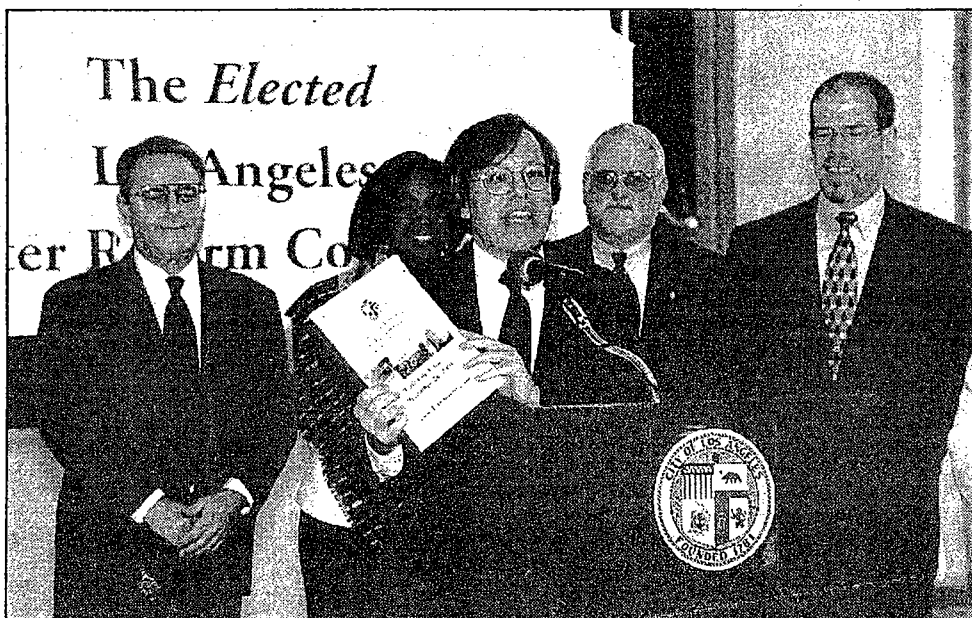
The draft charter would create a consolidated finance office under the control of the City Treasurer—an elected office, like that of the City Attorney.

Among other features, the draft document calls for:

- Creation of five planning commissions with responsibility for zoning and development issues.
- Creation of an independent commission to draw City Council and Board of Education districts.
- Expansion of the five-member Airports and Harbor commissions, both of which would include members from surrounding districts.
- Giving the LAPD inspector general the authority to undertake investigations without getting permission from the Police Commission. The investigations could be halted only by four votes of the five-member Police Commission.
- Creation of a claims board to settle claims against the city. The ceiling for those amounts has not been decided, but the elected panel recommends that the City Council have power to approve amounts greater than the limit set for the board.

Details about how neighborhood councils would be elected, or appointed, and what powers they would be accorded have yet to be worked out.

In related business, a conference committee of the two panels working on charter reform has also recom-



—Staff Photograph by Christine Rherra

Elected Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission Chairman Erwin Chemerinsky presents the panel's draft charter yesterday in front of City Hall East. Chemerinsky spoke about the importance of having neighborhood councils, one of many reforms included in the draft. Also pictured are, from left, City Councilman Joel Wachs and Elected Charter Reform Commissioners Jackie Dupont-Walker, Chet Widom and Bill Weinberger.

mended letting voters decide whether to expand the City Council to 25, or leave it as a 15-member legislative body.

The elected reform panel is the brainchild of Mayor Richard Riordan. The 15-member group has been studying the old, much-amended, nearly 700-page charter and working on coming up with a more straightforward blueprint for running city government.

Los Angeles' city government is considered to have a weak mayoral system, with the City Council able to override most mayoral decisions with a two-thirds vote.

Riordan, an attorney and businessman, often has complained about unnecessary bureaucracy and his office's inability to exert direct control over the management of city departments without the council's consent.

Riordan, who succeeded in stripping top city managers of civil service protections, has advocated giving future mayors carte blanche in firing department heads as a means of increasing bureaucratic accountability and giving the chief executive more control over the management of the nation's second-largest city government.

City Council members, however, have expressed fear that such reforms could drastically weaken their offices

and lead to official corruption. So they appointed a 21-member panel, also charged with revamping the city charter.

Last month, the Appointed Charter Reform Commission released its draft proposal for a new city "constitution."

It recommended an expanded 21-member City Council; requiring council approval for the mayor to fire general managers; creating neighborhood councils with advisory powers; and dividing the city into seven planning districts, among other things.

The elected and appointed panels are slated to vote on Jan. 5 and 6, respectively, on proposals from the conference committee.

Chemerinsky, a USC constitutional law expert, said he hadn't polled individual members of the elected commission on whether they will support the conference panel's recommendations.

"My guess is, it'll be a close decision," he said.

The deadline for putting a charter proposal on the June ballot is March 5.