

LOCAL

L.A. to air neighborhood plans

Councils designed to give communities voice

By Rick Orlov
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Eighteen months after Los Angeles voters said they wanted a greater say in their government, plans are to be revealed today on creating 100 to 200 neighborhood councils around the city.

Returning to the city's birthplace at Olvera Street, Mayor Richard Riordan and other officials will formally release the proposal to create a new system, beginning July 1, to allow communities to organize and offer their views.

"This is a highly sophisticated plan that will let communities become empowered and improve their quality of life," Riordan said in an interview. "What I envision is communities coming together to address specific issues and force government to respond to their concerns."

"Too many parts of the city feel they have no say, and this will let them tell us what they need."

The plan was developed by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment over the past year, following voter approval of the new City Charter in June 1999.

It envisions a series of neighborhood councils covering areas with a minimum of 20,000 residents, and possibly much larger — but not as large as the current 15 City Council districts, each of which includes more than 250,000 people.

Each council will be allowed to develop its own guidelines on how to operate and to focus on whatever issues are of local concern.

"I think what we have is a system where we will have independent, self-governing neighborhood councils which will be part of a formalized

system of giving input to the City Council and mayor," said Rob Glushon, a member of the DONE commission who also served on the elected Charter Reform Commission that came up with the neighborhood council concept.

"We decided to give them independence because everyone has their own idea on what a neighborhood council should be. I know some City Hall insiders don't like that and want a single system, but that doesn't work for some neighborhoods."

However, critics of the proposal remain skeptical of what the neighborhood councils will be able to accomplish.

Gerald Silver of the Homeowners of Encino had criticized the fact the neighborhood councils would be only advisory.

"As I look at this, however, I think it might be good that way," Silver said. "Otherwise, you could see businesses take these over and push through all kinds of things on signs, liquor sales and the like."

"As far as I'm concerned, I still see this as nothing more than an effort to quash down and quiet the objections of the Valley and secessionists. I don't think this is something that is workable. Maybe it would have had some impact 10 or 15 years ago, but now it's too late."

In particular, Silver said, is the uncertainty over the amount of funding that will be provided for the program. DONE did not include any dollar estimates for the staff and support of the councils.

Councilwoman Cindy Miskowski said she believes the political support will be there.

"The plan looks good and kicking it off will help get people interested," Miskowski said.