

GOVT EFFICIENCY MOTION

JUN 18 1996

CREATING NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS: A FUNDAMENTAL REFORM OF CITY GOVERNMENT

If there's one clear message throughout the city, it's that people want to be heard. They have something to say. They want a chance to participate. They want to feel they can make a difference and make things better.

We need to unite Angelenos of every race and color and creed, and rebuild this city -- not from the top down, but from the bottom up.

And the best place to start is in our neighborhoods. If there's one thing we all have in common, it's a neighborhood. A place where we call home.

Neighborhoods must be seen as a gift, not a problem.

Envision Los Angeles being turned into a Family of Neighborhoods, a family in which everyone participates and everyone takes pride.

It must start with the City Council formally empowering each of our city's neighborhoods to form their own neighborhood council, which in turn selects its own leaders, determines its own priorities, and reflects the broad diversity of its community. Recognizing that government has, and probably always will have, an inadequate supply of resources to solve our problems, the neighborhood councils would bring with them a greater initiative, responsibility, and reservoir of resources to help solve our pressing problems.

As they do in cities like Portland, St. Paul, Birmingham, Dayton, San Antonio, Tempe, Seattle, Salt Lake City, all of which have already begun similar neighborhood councils, they will meet regularly to participate in a wide range of critical issues.

And to create unity out of diversity, representatives of all the neighborhood councils will meet together at least quarterly on a citywide basis, as a Congress of Neighborhoods, to exchange concerns and form consensus on citywide issues.

To begin, the City Council shall establish as policy a system through which neighborhood councils are created throughout the city.

Starting in each of our existing 103 identified neighborhoods, community, business, school, religious and other leaders will come together and begin the process of further defining the boundaries of their neighborhoods, of forming their own councils, and of selecting their own leaders in whichever manner they choose. Each neighborhood council will adopt its own by-laws and procedures for selecting its representatives.

The City will create a support system to assist the neighborhood councils in organizing and staffing themselves.

Each neighborhood council will: organize open elections and provide free membership for anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the neighborhood; adopt a non-discrimination policy; develop a plan of goals and objectives, including a "Bill of Responsibilities"; develop a neighborhood disaster preparedness plan which would be part of a citywide "Prepare L.A." plan; ensure that the council truly represents the diverse interests of the neighborhood; train staff and community volunteers in conflict mediation skills; and communicate with all the people in the neighborhood on a regular basis.

The City shall adopt a policy giving each neighborhood a reasonable amount of time to review, debate, and make recommendations on a wide range of matters including, but not limited to: community-based policing; crime prevention projects; job training programs; transportation; planning and zoning decisions; neighborhood revitalization projects; alcohol permits; conditional use permits; community clean-up projects; street closures and barricades; traffic controls; preferential parking zones; parking meter rates; lighting; acquiring and improving parks and recreation facilities; variances to Building and Safety requirements; speed limits; police permits for parades, pool halls, etc.; design of community buildings, libraries, parks, and city facilities; historic designations; placement of bus benches; creation of assessment districts; demolitions; use of public lands for development; availability of tax-forfeited and surplus properties; water and power rates; and most importantly, the determination of city budget and spending priorities.

As in some cities, this "early warning" procedure will be guaranteed by ordinance.

Additionally, the City may eventually want to allow the neighborhood councils to bid on contracts to perform certain local services such as park maintenance, graffiti removal and prevention, etc. in order to provide an opportunity for neighborhood job opportunity programs to flourish.

All city departments and agencies shall be required to provide each neighborhood council with priority access to all information, records, etc. needed to conduct their deliberations.

Public funds would be made available to the neighborhood councils, starting with a small base amount needed to help pay for rent (if appropriate city facilities are unavailable), office expenses, and communications within the neighborhood on a regular basis.

Further funding for the councils could come from a combination of the city funds, new or redirected state and federal grant funds, private foundation grants, and money raised by the councils on their own. If public funds are provided, the city will prescribe the methods of financial accountability. The neighborhood councils will also be given first priority to surplus city equipment such as furniture and computers.

Additionally, leaders from each of the neighborhood councils will convene at least quarterly as a citywide Neighborhood Congress to discuss citywide matters such as City Charter amendments, ordinances, initiatives, programs, multi-cultural dialogue, and the general overall course of the city.

The key to the success of the neighborhood councils must be their independence from City Hall, and their ability to truly represent the diverse interests of their community.


Unlike other city-sanctioned community groups, representatives would not be appointed by governmental officials, and their structure would not be designed by City Hall. Instead, the councils' mandates would come directly from their neighbors.

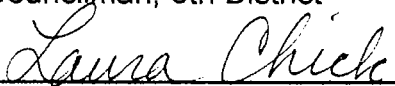
The councils will be able to build their strength through their ability to bring together all the diverse community interests, coming to a consensus, and thereby creating an influential community force that can't be ignored.

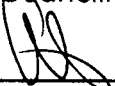
Through this process, neighborhoods will begin developing the connective tissue through which they share concerns, create a genuine understanding, discover common goals, and create unity through diversity. Our problems are shared challenges. So then should be our solutions.

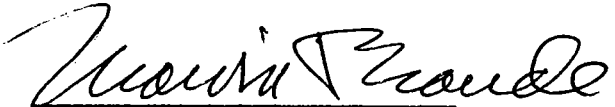
I THEREFORE MOVE that the Governmental Efficiency Committee develop and present to the City Council for adoption a plan to fundamentally reform city government through the establishment of independent neighborhood councils as hereinabove described.

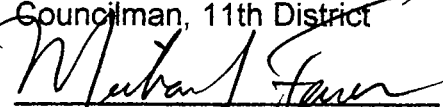
Presented by: 
JOEL WACHS
President Pro Tem

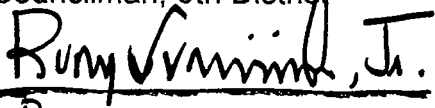
Seconded by: 
MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Councilman, 8th District


LAURA CHICK
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June 18, 1996