

CITY OF LOS ANGELES CHARTER REFORM COMMISSION

TO: ALL COMMISSIONERS  
FROM: Jerry Gaines *JG*  
SUBJECT: REVISIT OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS  
DATE: September 17, 1998

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After discussion with other commissioners and stakeholders, I would like to suggest that we consider the following modifications to our tentative decision on neighborhood councils:

1. Change the term neighborhood councils to community councils. Whatever sub-units will be established in the near term will be communities made up of several thousand residents. The term "Neighborhood" implies small numbers of residents. The Elected Commission is moving in this direction on defining community councils vs. neighborhood councils.
2. Change the term Department of Neighborhoods to Office of Community Councils. I believe that our intent is to establish a special administrative unit that would have skilled staff to assist communities in organizing community councils. Later this office would exist to provide services for community councils throughout the city. Most likely one-time funding will be needed to assist in the organization and start-up process. Later a more modest budget would be needed to provide a service agency that assists in coordination and operations of the various community councils.
3. Add a "template" starting point on establishing community boundaries for new community councils. Where we wish to mandate that boundaries be drawn based on communities, state that the existing Community Planning Districts be used for initial organization of community councils. They already exist and using them will avoid a lengthy process of setting up new maps. They have a known community history and are used by The Cultural Affairs Department for community events. The Planning Department has confirmed that they can alter boundaries of the five Districts' that have over 200,000 residents so that there would be 40

Planning Districts (average of 90,000 residents per district) to use for the initial organization of community councils. After an initial start-up period, community council district boundaries can be reviewed and revisions made after input from the respective communities involved.

Having a starting framework could assist voters in assessing the merits of approving the development of advisory community councils in the Charter Reform Campaign next June.

#### Summary:

As the debate on community-based participatory democracy unfolds, it seems clear that our preliminary decisions in the community (neighborhood) council area are for the most part realistic. Observing the debate within the Elected Commission, several liabilities are surfacing related to elected, decision-making councils. Issues related to conflict of interests within a community council panel on certain pending matters, and additional legal staffing costs to service such panels have surfaced in recent discussions.

As one commissioner, I would like to see voter approval of a working model of community councils that could get up to speed, have trial runs, have time for adjustment, and gain support from communities in all parts of the city during a five-year period. Better community participation in city government may be an outcome from this process.

P.S. My discussion model on a process of appointing members to community panels was really focused on the Elected Commission to see if they wanted to find middle ground on selection. It now appears that they will either go for self-selection or push their original view of elected selection. In the debate on advisory vs. decision-making, Con Howe, Planning Director noted that recently 98 recommendations were made by the existing Design Review Boards in the city with only 4 being appealed. All 98 recommendations were supported by the director.

**Neighborhood Council/Community Council Options**  
*First Draft dated September 17, 1998*

Entity	Examples	Community Size & Boundaries	Staff/Budget	Powers/rights	Duties/Responsibilities
1 Basic NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- group of existing HOA's and business groups</li> <li>- consortium of business and residents in mixed use area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- up to NC, hopefully not more than one or two census tracts</li> <li>- must respect natural community boundaries</li> <li>- NEC will mediate boundary disputes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mostly self funded; may be eligible for TA grants</li> <li>- DON technical support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- early warning re all matters affecting neighborhood</li> <li>- advisory role in budget priorities</li> <li>- advisory role in land use issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clear identification of boundaries</li> <li>- regular communication with members</li> <li>- public and open meetings</li> <li>- balanced representation by all diverse interests</li> <li>- participation in city training programs</li> </ul>
2 Enhanced NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- above plus</li> <li>- right to program portion of revenues</li> <li>- enhanced budget role (e.g., right to set local priorities and/or evaluate local recipients of city \$)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- above plus</li> <li>- some or all members may be <b>elected</b>, provided that overall composition is balanced.</li> </ul>
3 Basic CC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- group of NC's</li> <li>- combination of NC's and other community stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not more than approximately 150,000 people</li> <li>- should aggregate communities of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- must fund significant portion of own costs; sweat equity ok</li> <li>- consideration for full time staff at City expense</li> <li>- DON technical support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- powers/rights from 1 and 2 above plus</li> <li>- formal briefing and consultation during budget process</li> <li>- presumptive right to program portion of community-supported revenue growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- duties/responsibilities from 1 and 2 above plus</li> <li>- significant community betterment projects;</li> <li>- demonstrated support from diverse community sectors</li> </ul>
4 Enhanced CC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- above plus</li> <li>- presumption of at least 1 full time city-provided staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>above plus</li> <li>- absolute right to program portion of revenues</li> <li>- right to set local budget priorities</li> <li>- right to approve land use issues, subject to council override</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>above plus</li> <li>- some or all members may be <b>elected</b>, provided that overall composition is balanced.</li> </ul>

## NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS IN SELECTED CITIES

City	Powers	Procedural Mechanisms	Who Administers Program?	Selection Method	Boundary Criteria	Funding Requirements	Who Developed Plan?	System Review
Anchorage, AK	Advise on land use, social, and economic proposals which impact district residents Advise on comprehensive plan (Ordinance)	Early notification (Ordinance)	Mayor's Office (Ordinance)	Self-selected (Ordinance)	Neighborhoods (Ordinance)	None stated		None stated
Birmingham, AL	Advise on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community improvement / development</li> <li>• Zoning</li> <li>• Liquor, pool hall, and dance permits</li> <li>• Nominations to boards (Resolution)</li> </ul>	Early notification (Resolution)	Community Development Department (Resolution)	Informally elected (Resolution)	Neighborhoods	City only funds department; neighborhoods may raise own funds for eligible activities	City staff	Reviewed every two years (Resolution)
Dayton, OH	Advise on community decisions that affect their lives and neighborhoods, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointments</li> <li>• Laws</li> <li>• Expenditures</li> <li>• Liquor licenses</li> <li>• Planning and zoning</li> <li>• Environmental issues</li> </ul> Advise on service delivery (Resolution)	Early notification (Resolution)	Division of Neighborhood Affairs, CDD (Resolution)	Self-selected (Resolution)	Neighborhoods, with mixed-income groupings	None stated	City staff for Model Cities program	Every 5 years

City	Powers	Procedural Mechanisms	Who Administers Program?	Selection Method	Boundary Criteria	Funding Requirements	Who Developed Plan?	System Review
Detroit, MI	Advise on service delivery & community problem solving including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing</li> <li>Commercial blight</li> <li>Safety and security</li> <li>Economic opportunity and employment</li> </ul> (Charter)	Neighborhood council may require that city council representative consult with neighborhood councils (Charter)	Not stated	Elected (Charter)	Equal population, set by ordinance (Charter)	Cannot receive city funds, but may accept donations or grants (Charter)	Charter reform commission	None stated
New York City	Advise on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land use and Planning</li> <li>Budget</li> <li>Service delivery</li> </ul> (Charter)	General Process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receive proposals/applications</li> <li>Notify public, hold hearing, and make recommendations</li> <li>Notified of preliminary and final decisions</li> </ul> (Charter)	Each Board hires district manager (Charter)	Appointed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Borough president selects, half chosen from list from council members in borough</li> </ul> (Charter)	Neighborhoods and service delivery areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set by council resolution with public process</li> </ul> (Charter)	None stated	Borough President & Charter revision commissions	None stated
Portland, OR	Advise on any topic affecting the livability of the neighborhood, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land use</li> <li>Housing</li> <li>Community facilities</li> <li>Human resources</li> <li>Social and recreational programs</li> <li>Traffic and transportation</li> <li>Environmental quality</li> <li>Public safety</li> <li>Budget</li> </ul> (Ordinance)	Early notification (Ordinance)	Office of Neighborhood Involvement (Ordinance)	Self-selecting (Ordinance)	Self-determined (Resolution)	None stated	Task force	None stated

City	Powers	Procedural Mechanisms	Who Administers Program?	Selection Method	Boundary Criteria	Funding Requirements	Who Developed Plan?	System Review
St. Paul, MN	Advise on actions which may potentially impact the neighborhood and/or area residents (Resolution)	Early Notification (Resolution)	Division of Citizen Participation, Dept. of Planning and Economic Development	Informally elected (Resolution)	Self-determined (Resolution)	None stated	Committee and task forces	Part of annual budget review
Washington, DC	Advise on matters of public policy in area, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Streets</li> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Social services</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Grants</li> <li>• Plans, zoning changes, and variances</li> <li>• Public improvements</li> <li>• Licenses or permits</li> <li>• Budget and city goals, and priorities</li> <li>• Service delivery and proposed facilities</li> <li>• Liquor licenses</li> <li>• Construction and demolition permits</li> </ul> Other powers provided by Council (Charter)	Early notification (Charter) Included in petition process for liquor license appeals (Ordinance)	Service area coordinators (Charter)	Elected (Charter)	Equal population with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• Election wards</li> <li>• Service delivery</li> </ul> Set by Council (Charter)	City allocation not less than prior year, and based on population No commission may receive funds unless authorized (Charter)	Task forces	None stated

Sources: City charters, ordinances, and resolutions; CLA & CAO Report, "Comparison of Cities with Neighborhood Council Programs," March 30, 1998.