

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

0220-03385-0000

Date: *June 17, 1998*

To: The Governmental Efficiency Committee

From: Ronald Deaton, Chief Legislative Analyst
Keith Comrie, City Administrative Officer*R.D. by S. J. J.*
*K.C.*Subject: **NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL PROPOSALS**

From May 20 - 23, 1998, staff attended the 23rd Annual Neighborhoods USA (NUSA) Conference in Portland, Oregon. In addition to the information gained from the general NUSA sessions, staff conducted in-depth interviews after the sessions with representatives from several cities, including Dayton, Ohio; Birmingham, Alabama; Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon, Pasadena, California and Little Rock, Arkansas. Staff also spoke at length with Ken Thomson, co-author of Rebirth of Urban Democracy. The information learned from that conference is reported in the Findings section of this report.

At the May 6, 1998 meeting of the Governmental Efficiency Committee (GE), the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) and the City Administrative Officer (CAO) were requested to meet with each Committee Member to outline each Member's neighborhood council proposal. Councilmember Ridley-Thomas, in consultation with his Eight District Neighborhood Councils Task Force, has submitted comments and questions for GE to consider as GE continues its evaluation of neighborhood council proposals. As a result of GE's request to staff to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives from other cities and to enable GE to study staffs' NUSA Conference report, this report only addresses the NUSA Conference. The proposals of the Councilmembers will be provided after the Councilmembers have had an opportunity to evaluate this information.

Recommendation

Note and File.

Fiscal Impact Statement

There is no General Fund impact at this time.

Findings

The 23rd Annual Neighborhoods USA (NUSA) Conference was held in Portland, Oregon, from May 20 - 23, 1998. In addition to the information gained from the general NUSA sessions, staff conducted in-depth interviews after the sessions with representatives from several cities, including Dayton, Ohio; Birmingham, Alabama; Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon, Pasadena, California and Little Rock, Arkansas. Staff also spoke at length with Ken Thomson, co-author of Rebirth of Urban Democracy.

Summarized herein are comments from conference participants on several issues which GE is currently addressing, including boundaries, the selection process and inclusiveness.

Boundaries

Representatives from each of the cities represented stated that the community stakeholders determined the boundaries for their neighborhoods. In many instances, there are overlapping boundaries but, in general, the neighborhoods accept this.

In 1996, the City of Portland conducted an evaluation of its neighborhood participation program. Specifically, the City examined its Neighborhood Associations (NA), District Coalitions (DC) and Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA). NAs are equivalent to the Tier One Neighborhoods proposed by GE. DCs are equivalent to Tier Two, Regional Councils. Portland's findings are as follows:

- The City determined that there were more than 30 overlapping boundaries.
- Most NAs were satisfied sharing overlapping boundaries.
- To assist dissatisfied neighborhoods, the City determined that the ONA should provide conflict resolution/mediation services.
- If the conflict is not resolved within six months, the ONA may withdraw funding.
- For administrative purposes, the City, with the involvement of the citizens, may define neighborhoods without overlapping boundaries.
- City notices on land use matters should be distributed based on all NAs' self-defined boundaries.

Neighborhoods

Discussions about the size of neighborhoods brought forth the following comments:

- Size matters!
- Ken Thomson stated that, ideally, a neighborhood should be no larger than 10,000 people. It should be small enough to provide the community stakeholders an opportunity to participate at a grassroots level. (For Los Angeles, that could mean 350 or more communities of 10,000 people each)

- Ken Thomson also stated that each added layer of structure further removes the government from its grassroots; each structural layer must always be accountable to the grass roots.

Selection Process

What do you think about appointments to either the neighborhood organizations or to the Tier Two organizations?

- Bad idea!
- This is an organization of "the people" and "the people" should make the decisions!
- Appointments are considered to be politically motivated and therefore suspect.

What do you think about a combination of self-selection and appointments?

- Perhaps that could work, but it would be better to let "the people" decide for themselves.
- A better idea than all appointments.

How do people self-select?

- A slate of candidates is determined several weeks before the meeting at which the election is to occur.
- Elections occur at a designated meeting.
- In Dayton, OH, neighborhood elections are conducted during the summer (not at the time of the primary or general elections). Voters mail in their ballots to the City Clerk; run-off decisions are determined at a designated local meeting.

How do your organizations prevent one person from monopolizing or taking over the organization?

- Organization monopoly can sometimes be an uncomfortable issue.
- Encourage "reasonable" people to run for office.
- Organization participants must learn to assert themselves so that the monopoly does not occur.
- Leadership and conflict resolution training help community stakeholders address that possibility.

Neighborhood Councils and the Business Community

How do you address the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) issue?

- Neighborhood organizations are often considered NIMBYs because of their stand on various land use issues.
- Most important, let the people know what the plan is and provide an opportunity for neighborhood input.
- If people know that their actions will not make a difference, they tend to take extreme positions; if, however, they know they will be heard and their issues addressed, they tend to take a more moderate position.
- Neighborhoods are often able to address situations in ways that government did not consider; there is often more than one answer.

Two Dayton, Ohio Situations:

The City presents all issues, including land use issues to the neighborhood associations and Priority Boards (PBs) for comment. In land use cases, the PB then conducts a public hearing with the developer, home owners, the neighborhood associations and block club leaders in the impacted area. After discussion with the developer, the PB makes recommendations and presents its recommendations to the City's Planning Board. The Planning Board then conducts a public hearing on the issue and presents its recommendations to the City Commission. The City Commission conducts a public hearing on the issue and those decisions are binding, unless overturned by the courts.

1. Zone Change to Site a Landfill

In winter 1992, Waste Management, a private company, proposed to site a landfill in the Southwest PB area, a fairly affluent, canyon area of Dayton. Because that area of Southwest is zoned residential, siting a landfill there required a zone change. The City established a landfill study committee which included the environmental agencies and all impacted City departments. The Southwest community unanimously recommended that the area remain residential and that the zoning change be denied.

After review of the environmental, City department reports and the PB's recommendations, the Planning Board recommended no zoning change. The zoning for Southwest would not have to change to accommodate the landfill. The City Commissioners also concurred with the staff recommendations.

Subsequent to the Commissioners' action, Waste Management sued the City of Dayton in federal court. The case was negotiated out of court. As part of the negotiation, the City agreed to avoid fines and penalties by rezoning the area to accommodate the landfill. Waste Management agreed to pay the City of Dayton \$500,000/year to compensate the two neighborhoods determined to be impacted by the landfill.

It was determined that the Southwest and Innerwest areas were impacted by the zone change. Those areas will receive \$500,000/year for the 10 years the landfill will be open. One half of those funds are spent on economic development initiatives and the other half on social and housing projects. The two PBs have a citizen representatives on the review committee which recommends which projects to fund. The City Manager reviews these recommendations and almost always follows the recommendations of the PBs.

Since the siting of the landfill in the summer of 1995, the citizens actively monitor the situation and Waste Management has responded to the citizens' complaints.

2. Zone Change to Accommodate a Drug Store

In winter 1997, a bank closed its local branch and sold the land to a retail drug store chain. A portion of the land must be rezoned to accommodate the drug store. The PB conducted a public meeting with the developer and the community. The community worked with the developer for concessions in several areas, including: 1) the ingress for the proposed pharmacy, 2) the building's exterior so that it conforms to other buildings in the area, 3) landscaping and 4) security. Because the developer worked with the neighborhood association, the neighborhood association recommended approval of the zone change and the Planning Board concurred with the community's recommendation at its April 20, 1998 meeting.

The City Commission will hear this issue at its meeting on Wednesday, June 17, 1998. PB staff have indicated that the Commission will most likely approve the zone change because the neighborhood associations and the PB have had input and also approve the zone change. According to the PB staff, developers have learned that it's better to work with the community to reach consensus prior to going to the Planning Board and the City Commission.

Diversity/Inclusiveness

What are obstacles to diversity/inclusiveness?

- The biggest obstacles are language and cultural differences, particularly in immigrant populations.
- It is a challenge to address populations with little or no experience with the democratic process.
- In certain countries and cultures, there is a backlash against the participant for belonging to such organizations; therefore, fear is a factor, as well.

How do you insure that the neighborhood organizations reflect the community?

- Build trust and be persistent in outreach efforts.
- Provide resources and information to the neighborhoods to enable them to reach a broader audience.

- The City of Los Angeles is on target to be concerned about inclusiveness because the other cities continue to address that issue.

Funding

- Most cities provide resources at Tier Two, the Regional Council, neighborhood cluster or coalition level.
- Individual neighborhood organizations usually receive funding through Matching Fund programs.

General Comments from the various cities

- Citywide participation will not occur overnight. The programs in the cities we reviewed have been in place from 10 to 25 years or more and the programs are still evolving, growing and addressing the same questions the City of Los Angeles is currently asking!
- Accountability and a method of evaluation should be built in to any participation system.
- Grassroots level organizations must be able to reach as many people as possible.
- The neighborhood organizations provide input to the City on a wide range of issues and is not restricted to any one area or issue.
- Leadership training, teaching outreach methods and capacity building are critical to success.
- Leadership training and capacity building empower neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood leaders acknowledge that their organizations' position on issues will not win every time; however, neighborhoods are able to better accept the final outcome if they have had the opportunity for input and their concerns were listened to, acknowledged and, to the extent possible, acted on.
- The democratic process is sometimes messy and often time consuming because all discussions are conducted in public, but the results are far more satisfactory.

RD:KCJOS:dbu

Attachment

- Most cities provide resources at Tier Two, the Regional Council, neighborhood cluster or coalition level.
- Individual neighborhood organizations usually receive funding through Matching Fund programs.

General Comments from the various cities

- Citywide participation will not occur overnight. The programs in the cities we reviewed have been in place from 10 to 25 years or more and the programs are still evolving, growing and addressing the same questions the City of Los Angeles is currently asking!
- Accountability and a method of evaluation should be built in to any participation system.
- Grassroots level organizations must be able to reach as many people as possible.
- The neighborhood organizations provide input to the City on a wide range of issues and is not restricted to any one area or issue.
- Leadership training, teaching outreach methods and capacity building are critical to success.
- Leadership training and capacity building empower neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood leaders acknowledge that their organizations' position on issues will not win every time; however, neighborhoods are able to better accept the final outcome if they have had the opportunity for input and their concerns were listened to, acknowledged and, to the extent possible, acted on.
- The democratic process is sometimes messy and often time consuming because all discussions are conducted in public, but the results are far more satisfactory.

ATTACHMENT

PROPOSAL OF COUNCILMEMBER WACHS

PURPOSE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: To provide input to government on issues of interest and importance to the community prior to government's taking formal action on a proposal. Although the forum for participation would be advisory, the strength of citizen participation would be derived from its representation of the diverse interests of its areas, and from having the skills, staff, communication systems, and resources to be strong advocates for local, citywide, and regional issues of importance to its communities.

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS: The Department of Neighborhoods (DON) would help neighborhoods organize into neighborhood councils. The neighborhood councils would then be clustered into at least 15 community council areas, equal in population.

The DON would support and ensure the success of the neighborhood and community

councils by: 1) teaching them about City government, 2) arranging leadership, cultural awareness and dispute mediation training; 3) arranging the quarterly Congress of Neighborhoods meetings; 4) helping them acquire financial and in-kind support, such as acquiring surplus equipment and identifying and pursuing grants and other funding sources; 5) assisting with the preparation of applications for non-profit status; 6) maintaining an information and communications network using e-mail, the Internet, and other technology; 7) acting as an advocate on behalf of the community and neighborhood councils; and 8) publishing a newsletter that is distributed to every stakeholder in the city at least three times a year.

The general manager would be appointed and removed in the same manner as other general managers. The general manager and other management staff would be exempt City employees capable of handling the highly specialized, politically sensitive, and possibly temporary nature of the jobs.

BOUNDARIES: The neighborhood and community councils would determine their own boundaries. The boundaries of each neighborhood, and resulting clusters of neighborhoods (communities) must always respect neighborhood boundaries.

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITIES: The City would recognize, fund and provide sufficient office space and resources to support at least 15 clusters of neighborhoods called "communities."

SELECTION PROCESS: In the interest of grassroots empowerment and flexibility, neighborhoods would have the ability to pick their own leaders. The leaders of the neighborhood councils would be informally self-selected by interested participants who live, work, or own property in the neighborhood. The leaders of the neighborhood councils would then self-select the members of the community council boards, and prescribe their method of doing so in the plan they submit to the City for recognition.

RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS: Each community council would "petition" the City through the Commission of the DON, for official recognition and support. The DON Commission would be established to evaluate and recognize community council petitions. Each community must have the ability to design a system tailored to meet their needs.

FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY COUNCILS: Community councils would be given sufficient resources to maintain an office. From this office, community councils would communicate with the stakeholders in their area, with other community councils and with the government.

"EARLY WARNING ORDINANCE": Neighborhoods and communities must be notified of proposed projects, ordinances, and actions far enough in advance to enable them to meet, discuss, and establish a position, if they wish, before a final decision is made. Through the establishment of an "early warning ordinance", City agencies would proactively notify neighborhoods of neighborhood issues, and the community councils

of community and citywide issues and provide priority access to all public information and records needed to conduct their deliberations. City agencies would establish policies that are neighborhood and community friendly.

RECOGNITION OF NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS:

Each neighborhood and community council seeking official recognition from the City shall submit a plan showing, at a minimum:

- a. A guarantee that any neighborhood selection of leaders will be equal, free, and non-discriminatory to anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the area (i.e., the stakeholders).
- b. A plan of goals and objectives.
- c. The method by which the neighborhood and community councils will communicate with each stakeholder on a regular basis.
- d. Assurances that the leadership of the neighborhood council will reflect the diverse interests within their area.
- e. Assurances that the leadership of the councils represent the diverse interests within their area.
- f. A system for financial accountability of its funds.

Eighth District Neighborhood Councils Task Force

Government Efficiency Committee

FROM: Eighth District Neighborhood Councils Task Force

RE: Comments on Proposed Neighborhood Councils Structure

DATE: Thursday, June 11, 1998

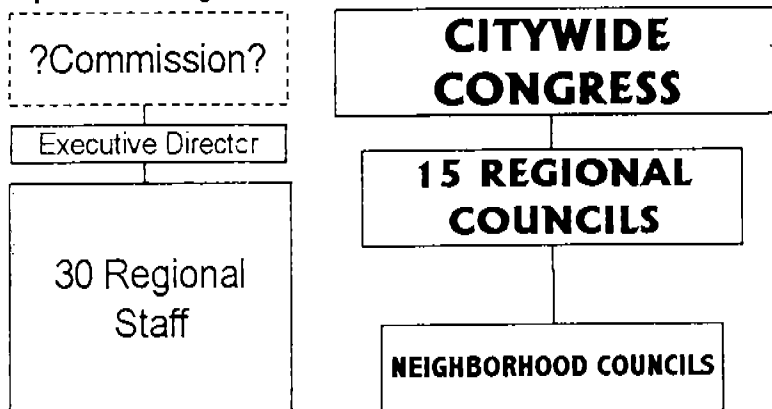
In light of the current citywide discussion and significant debate about neighborhood councils, the Eighth District Empowerment Congress recently empowered a Neighborhood Council Task Force. This task force is composed of representatives of the four Area Assemblies of the Empowerment Congress. They are:

Anthony Thigpenn, Chair
David Gutierrez, North Area
Romerol Malveaux, West Area
Clarence Jackson, Southwest Area
Harold Greenberg, North Area

This task force has reviewed the work of the two Charter Commissions and the Government Efficiency Committee. The following is a chart and summary of the proposed recommendations made by the Government Efficiency Committee as the task force understands it. Additionally, the task force has raised several important points for consideration as well as key questions about the proposed structure for the Government Efficiency Committee to answer.

Summary of Government Efficiency Committee Recommendations

Department of Neighborhoods



1. Councils would be advisory.
2. Councils structure would have 3-tiers:
 - A. Neighborhood Councils based on self-defined boundaries
 - B. Regional Councils based on boundaries of Council districts
 - C. Citywide Congress
3. There would be an early warning system on issues.
4. There would be a Department of Neighborhoods with 30 regional staff persons with a budget of \$3 million to provide staff support for the Councils.
5. Councils would be constructed based on some form of self-selection.

COMMENTS ON PROPOSED STRUCTURE:

1. Charter amendments should provide principles and guidelines, but allow flexibility in the development of the details of neighborhood councils structure/process.
2. The development of the neighborhood councils structure should be seen as an overlay on existing neighborhood groups such as block clubs and neighborhood associations.
3. The success of the structure will be based on the degree to which it is seen as an official vehicle for getting broader information and a way of getting things done.
4. Self-identifying neighborhoods must be thought through carefully to balance empowering neighborhoods with developing a manageable structure.
(for example, the committee identified at least 12 potential neighborhoods in the 8th District. If this was replicated in each of the 15 regional areas that would be 180 neighborhood councils citywide)
5. Language barriers will be a key issue to address.
6. Staff for the Department of Neighborhoods must be selected very carefully to ensure they have the background and attitude needed to assist in the development of the councils.
7. System must ensure that there are live people to talk to and interact with as oppose to automated phone systems.
8. A tremendous outreach effort will be needed to ensure that the structure reaches beyond groups already organized and increases the overall civic participation in neighborhoods.
9. The use of technology in the developing of Neighborhood Councils could make the difference between success and failure.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What will be the selection process and timeline?
 - A. How will boundaries of neighborhood councils be determined?
 - B. How will representatives be selected?
 - C. What will be the mechanisms to ensure the various levels of the structure reflect the diversity of the communities?
2. Who will the various levels of the structure be advisory to?
3. What will be the relationship of the various levels of the structure to the City Council offices?
4. What will be the role of technology?