

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

0220-03385-0000

Date: April 20, 1998

To: The Governmental Efficiency Committee

From: Ronald F. Deaton, Chief Legislative Analyst
Keith B. Comrie, City Administrative Officer

Subject: **NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

At the April 15, 1998 meeting of the Governmental Efficiency Committee (GE), the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) and the City Administrative Officer (CAO) were requested to: 1) report back on the decisions GE agreed to regarding neighborhood councils, 2) provide options for consideration for the areas requiring further discussion and 3) determine how other cities with neighborhood councils programs determined their selection process, boundaries and verify that the councils represent all segments of the neighborhood.

GE decided that:

1. It would proceed with implementation of the program and not wait for recommendations from the Charter Commissions;
2. All councils would be advisory because a Charter amendment is required to make the councils decision-making bodies;
3. The City would begin with a pilot program of advisory councils and allow the councils to reconvene on this issue after two or three years to determine whether or not the councils should remain advisory or become decision-making bodies;
4. There would be a three-tiered system for the councils: a) tier one - neighborhoods - throughout the City each neighborhood will determine its own boundaries (which may overlap); b) tier two -- that there would be Regional Councils and c) tier three -- the City-wide Congress of Neighborhoods (Attachment I);
5. Through the Office/Department of Neighborhoods, staff would be provided at the second-tier (Regional Council level) to insure that all neighborhoods are fully and fairly represented and to provide the staff support necessary to assist the neighborhood groups;
6. The City would establish an early warning ordinance which allows neighborhoods a specified period of time within which to submit input;

The Governmental Efficiency
Committee - 2

7. The City would establish community service centers throughout the City;
and,
8. Staff would determine the resources both financial and personnel to support
this proposal.

The areas for which further discussion are required are listed in Attachment II. In the Findings Section of this report is a discussion of the boundary, selection and inclusiveness issues.

RECOMMENDATION

Note and file.

Fiscal Impact Statement

There is no General Fund impact at this time.

(Statement of Findings attached)

*KC:RFD:JOS:JP
u/group2/jos.wpd*

Attachments

FINDINGS:

1. **Background**

At the April 15, 1998 meeting of the Governmental Efficiency Committee (GE), the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) and the City Administrative Officer (CAO) were requested to: 1) report back on the decisions GE agreed to regarding neighborhood councils, 2) provide options for consideration for the areas requiring further discussion and 3) determine how other cities with neighborhood councils programs determined their boundaries, selection process, and verify that the councils represent all segments of the neighborhood. A discussion of the boundary and selection process at tier two, Regional Councils, and how other cities address the issue of inclusiveness, is included in the Findings.

2. **Discussion of the Boundary Issues for the Second Tier - Regional Councils**

If Regional Councils are divided by:

A. **Council Districts (CD) or three subdivisions of each CD for a total of 45 Regional Councils -**

Arguments For:

1. All CDs are the same size, approximately 250,000 people and 45 subdivisions would provide more manageable areas of approximately 83,000 people;
2. City staff and many citizens may already be familiar with their CD boundaries and subdivisions may be easily drawn;
3. CD staff may assist with Regional Council issues because they know the areas and issues; and,
4. Although required redistricting will occur in two years, in 2000, implementation of redistricting may not occur until 2002 because it takes at least two years to implement the change; therefore Regional Councils may operate without change for approximately four years;

Arguments Against:

1. Redistricting requires that CD boundaries change every ten years;
2. The next redistricting of CD boundaries is scheduled in two years and the Regional Council boundaries would be required to change, as well;
3. Redistricting may significantly change the CD and/or Regional Council boundaries; and,
4. As residents become familiar with their Regional Council areas, redistricting may require the residents to become familiar with newly redrawn boundaries.

B. **35 Planning Areas (with possible adjustments)**

The Governmental Efficiency
Committee - 4

Arguments For:

1. The boundaries are already identified;
2. Adjustments may be made within the boundaries of the more populous planning areas to insure that all planning areas contain approximately the same number of people and the City may be more evenly divided;
3. Redistricting does not impact the boundaries; the boundaries rarely change;
4. Boundary stability may be more reassuring to the residents;

Arguments Against:

1. The population within certain planning areas includes as many as 250,000 and as few as 40,000 people;

C. 70 Library Areas (with possible adjustments)

Arguments For:

1. The library areas are much smaller than either CDS or planning areas;
2. Many more people may be more familiar with their library area than with any other area;
3. Library boundaries are stable and are only modified if a new library facility is introduced into an especially large area;

Arguments Against:

1. It may be too expensive to provide staff, office space, supplies, etc. to 70 or more areas;
2. If the City has to withdraw resources due to budgetary constraints, it may negatively impact the Regional Councils structure;

3. Regional Councils - Self-Selection; Appointment or Combination

A. Self-Selection

Arguments For:

1. Each region has the opportunity/freedom to make its own selections based on the resident's knowledge of its neighborhoods;
2. Each region would be required to show how its membership represents the entire community;
3. Regions may perceive this process to be empowering because they are making the decisions and are responsible for implementation;

Arguments Against:

1. Regional representation may not be broad-based;

2. Regions may not be able to show how its membership represents the entire community;
3. Regions may have to overcome the perception that one segment of the community has co-opted the process for the entire community;

B. Appointments

Arguments For:

1. Councilmembers know their communities and can insure that the selections are broad-based;
2. Appointments may be used to “jump-start” the neighborhood council process and may be phased out later;

Arguments Against:

1. With the exception of New York City and the Eighth District Empowerment Congress (which uses a combination process), no other city we studied uses the appointment process;
2. Those cities did not use the appointment process because, after public input, residents stated that: a) the self selection process is empowering and b) it provides the residents “ownership” of the process;

C. Combination of Self-Selection and Appointments

Arguments For:

1. The neighborhoods and the Councilmembers would both have an opportunity for input into the process;
2. Councilmembers could insure that participation is broad-based;

Arguments Against:

1. With the exception of New York City and the Eighth District Empowerment Congress, none of the cities we studied conducted the combination process because some cities adopted a self-selection policy only after public input.

4. Inclusiveness/Broad-Based Representation

We asked the cities of Pasadena, CA; St. Paul, MN; Portland, OR; and Birmingham, AL how they addressed the issue of inclusiveness and broad-based representation in their programs. All cities stated that: 1) they continue to address that issue on an on-going basis and 2) there are no easy solutions. However, all cities use some or all of the following methods to insure inclusiveness:

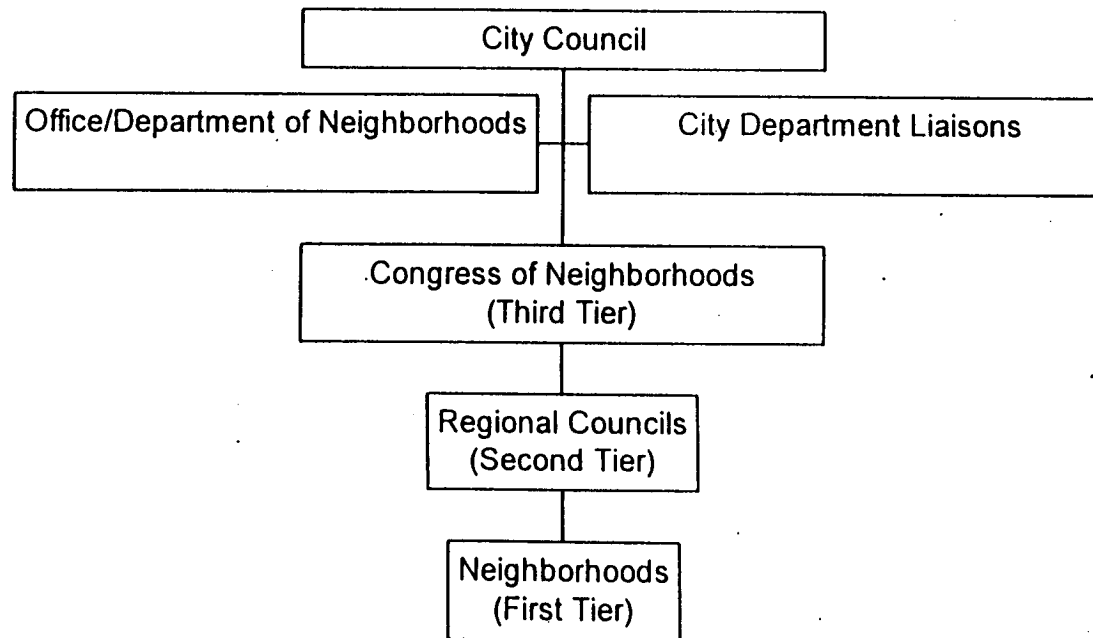
1. The Regional Council equivalents in those cities are required to show that their membership and participation process is inclusive;
2. There is a City recognition process which includes a detailed discussion of the Regional Council’s selection process; and,

The Governmental Efficiency
Committee - 6

3. If some residents of a Regional Council area believe that their interests are not being fairly represented or addressed, the City is notified and that Regional Council is required to develop and implement a solution.

Neighborhood Councils

THREE-TIERED ORGANIZATION



AREAS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. **Neighborhoods** - should include interested individuals; existing neighborhood associations, such as homeowners and tenant organizations, community-based organizations, such as block clubs and neighborhood watch groups; schools; religious institutions; ethnic organizations; businesses; etc.
2. **Tier One - Neighborhoods** (refer to number one above)
 - A. Recognition Process
 1. Should the City recognize neighborhoods - tier one?
 2. Should recognition for tier one occur at tier two?
 3. Is formal recognition for tier one unnecessary because tier one should be open to individuals, existing organizations and self-defined?
3. **Tier Two - Regional Councils**
 - A. To assist in the initial implementation of the process, should the City prepare a preliminary set of guidelines which include a discussion of: a) advisory or decision-making; b) early warning system; c) the recognition process; d) organizational structure; e) member selection; f) representation (inclusiveness); g) voting requirements; and h) boundaries; or,
 - B. Should neighborhoods be responsible for the preparation of the above?
4. **Tier Two - City Implementation of Regional Councils**
 - A. Advisory or Decision-making
 1. **The Committee agreed to an advisory role for neighborhood councils because decision-making authority requires a Charter amendment.**
 2. **After a two or three-year period, the citizens may determine the effectiveness of the advisory role and whether or not the councils should become decision-making bodies.**
 - B. Early Warning System
 1. **The Committee agreed that neighborhoods should be allowed a specified period of time during which they may submit input, with no obligation for the City to consider input after the deadline.**

2. Within what period of time should neighborhoods be required to respond?
 - a. 30 days
 - b. 60 days
 - c. Other
3. For which neighborhood issues should the early warning system be operative:
 - a. All issues;
 - b. Zoning and Land use;
 - c. Issuance of licenses, such as liquor;
 - d. Infrastructure changes, such as libraries, recreation and parks facilities;
 - e. Expenditure of funds within the neighborhood area;
 - f. Combination of some of the above.
4. Whose responsibility is it to insure that neighborhoods are aware of issues impacting their neighborhoods so that neighborhoods may respond prior to the deadline?
5. Should City departments be required to include in their report to the City Council the neighborhood council's input on issues impacting the neighborhood?

C. Recognition Process

1. Are Regional Councils automatically considered recognized because the City provides the organization details; or,
2. Is a formal recognition process still necessary to insure that all Regional Councils abide by the City's organizational structure?

D. Organization/Structure of the Regional Councils

1. Rules/Regulations/By-laws
 - a. Should the City provide general by-laws that Regional Councils may modify to reflect their neighborhood's goals and vision?
 - b. Should the City set strict by-laws that Regional Councils may not modify without prior City approval?

E. Member Selection

1. Should the Regional Councils self-select their members?
2. Should Regional Council members be appointed?
3. Should there be a combination of self-selection and appointments to the Regional Councils?
4. Should there be an application process by which interested volunteers may participate in the Regional Councils?

5. Should there be some combination of numbers 1,2,3 and 4?
- F. Representation/Inclusiveness
1. Should the Regional Councils be responsible for insuring that all segments of their community are represented?
 2. What acceptable forms of evidence may the neighborhood councils provide?
 3. To whom should this evidence be provided - the City Council; the Department/Office of Neighborhoods; other entity?
- G. Voting Requirements - Who should be eligible to vote and who should be eligible to be elected?
1. Registered voters only? (If so, should the City conduct the elections?)
 2. All residents, regardless of whether or not registered?
 3. Everyone with a vested interest in the community, including residents, business owners, agency representatives, etc.?
 4. Should there be minimum age requirements?
 5. Should these decisions be left to the neighborhood to determine in its by-laws? (Neighborhoods would also be responsible for conducting their own elections).
 6. Should members be elected at-large?
 7. Should members represent a defined geographic area within the Regional Council?
 8. Should members represent specific issues?
- H. Boundaries
1. **The Committee agreed that:**
 - a. **at tier one, neighborhoods may select their own boundaries, which may overlap; and,**
 - b. **at tier three, there will be a City-wide Congress.**
 2. At Tier two, Regional Councils (Detailed discussion of boundaries is in Findings, No. --), should Regional Councils be divided by:
 - a. The 15 Council Districts or 45 areas City-wide (three subdivisions of each Council District)?
 - b. The 35 Planning Areas with some adjustments for more highly populated planning areas?
 - c. The 70 library branch areas with some adjustments for more highly populated library branch areas?
 - d. Should new lines be drawn and who should determine the boundaries?
 3. Adjustments to the Boundaries
 - a. Who should determine boundary adjustments at each tier?

- b. What issues/circumstances should determine the need for these adjustments?
- c. How often should the boundaries be adjusted?

5. **Tier Two -- Neighborhood Implementation of Regional Councils**

- A. For all issues in Number 4, should neighborhoods be responsible for the decisions and implementation of Regional Councils, with assistance provided through the Office/Department of Neighborhoods?

6. **The City Hall Infrastructure to Support Neighborhood Councils**

- A. Office/Department of Neighborhoods
 - 1. **The Committee agreed that City resources should be provided at the second tier, Regional Councils.**
 - 2. Should staff be provided in City Hall and the Regional Council Offices or in both the Regional Council Offices and in City Hall?
 - 3. Should the staff for the Office/Department be civil service or exempt?
 - 4. Should the Regional Council members be allowed to select their staff from a short list of approved candidates or should City Hall select the staff for the Regional Councils?
 - 5. Should the Regional Council staff work under short-term contracts of one or two years, renewable by the Regional Council Committee?
 - 6. How should the City address resolution of disputes?
- B. Source of Funds for Regional Councils
 - 1. From what funding sources should the City pay for the Regional Councils and for the City Hall infrastructure?
 - 2. Are there special grants available for some or all portions of the City's program?
 - 3. Should the City begin with an initial General Fund outlay and at the same time pursue grants from all available sources?
- C. Constituent Service Centers (CSC)
 - 1. The Committee has stated that it would like CSCs throughout the City. May the provision of CSCs be researched and reported to the Committee after GE makes decisions on Regional Council?
 - 2. Should the provision of CSCs begin with the assessment by the Department of General Services (GSD) (see joint CLA & CAO report dated April 7, 1998 for details).

D. Special Programs

1. Should the City provide special incentive programs to the neighborhoods?
2. Should the City's Neighborhood Matching Fund program be included in the Office/Department of Neighborhoods?

E. Method of Outreach

1. By what means should the City advertise and educate Los Angeles about this program to insure the broadest participation?
2. Should there be a regular mailing of a City-wide newsletter to every resident in Los Angeles?
3. How should the City address the non-English speaking residents?