

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

0220-03385-0000

Date: *March 4, 1998*

ITEM NO. 2

To: The Governmental Efficiency Committee

From: Keith Comrie, City Administrative Officer *KBC*Subject: **CREATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS**

At its February 25, 1998 meeting, the Governmental Efficiency Committee (GE) requested staff to: 1) determine the resources that will be required to submit a plan to create neighborhood councils and 2) report on four City Council motions regarding neighborhood councils.

Required Resources

The issues regarding the creation of neighborhood councils and a Department of Neighborhoods (DON) in the City of Los Angeles are complex. To fully explore all the issues and their ramifications, City staff should investigate: 1) the neighborhood councils of other large, metropolitan cities, including related ordinances, 2) existing neighborhood organizations within the City, 3) the City infrastructure required to support the councils and 4) cost estimates and funding options for both the neighborhood councils and the supporting City infrastructure. Based on the results of the investigation, staff should create a plan for the structure and functioning of neighborhood councils in the ethnically, racially and geographically diverse City of Los Angeles and submit these recommendations to GE for consideration. Input from both local experts and experts in other large, metropolitan cities with neighborhood councils should also be considered. These experts would be able to provide the benefit of their study and experience. The CAO will report back at the next GE meeting with a proposed work plan and time line to complete the study of these issues.

Although the following is not an all inclusive list, the challenge of creating a structure for neighborhood councils may include consideration of:

- 1) how to determine the geographic boundaries of the City's numerous neighborhoods;
- 2) the general population for each neighborhood;
- 3) the number of council members for each neighborhood council;
- 4) whether or not the council members should be appointed or elected;

- 5) whether or not each council member should be a community volunteer or paid for services rendered;
- 6) whether or not the council's recommendations should be advisory or binding;
- 7) how to insure representation from the entire community;
- 8) the issue of non-registered voters;
- 9) how often the councils should meet;
- 10) where the councils should meet;
- 11) dispute resolution between neighborhoods with common boundaries and competing interests;
- 12) an examination of existing neighborhood structures to determine the ways in which existing organizations may be used; existing organizations include: Park Advisory Boards, Block Clubs, Neighborhood Watch groups, Neighborhood Associations, Neighborhood Advocacy Councils and Homeowners Associations;
- 13) the structure of neighborhood councils in other large, metropolitan cities; and,
- 14) the City Hall infrastructure required to support these councils.

City Council Motions

The following four motions were introduced at various times regarding the creation and structure of neighborhood councils:

- 1) Motion (Wachs; Ridley-Thomas, Chick, Alatorre, Braude, Feuer, Svorinch) for the GE Committee to develop and present to the City Council for adoption a plan to reform City government through the establishment of independent neighborhood councils - introduced June 1996 (C.F. 96-1157);
- 2) Motion (Ridley-Thomas; Wachs, Chick, Goldberg, Hernandez) to adopt a three-year Citywide neighborhood congress pilot project which respects community and council district boundaries, as appropriate - introduced February 1997 (C.F. 96-1157);
- 3) Motion (Chick; Wachs) for the CLA and CAO to: 1) work with various City departments to present a proposal to restructure existing City resources without adding new bureaucracy to create a DON, 2) examine how other cities, such as Portland and Seattle, structure their neighborhood programs, 3) explore possible grant funds for this effort and 4) prepare a plan and time line for setting up the DON - introduced April 1997 (C.F. 96-1157-S1); and,
- 4) Motion (Ridley-Thomas; Wachs) for the CAO to chair a working group of various City departments to determine funding options for the DON and report back to the Budget and Finance and GE Committees within 30 days - introduced May 1997 (C.F. 97-0731).

The first motion, to develop a plan to establish neighborhood councils, will be addressed with the investigation of these issues by staff with the assistance of experts, both local and from other cities with neighborhood councils. Staff recommendations will address the items listed above and additional issues, as appropriate.

The second motion, to adopt a three-year Citywide neighborhood congress pilot project, should be addressed after a proposal for the structure of both neighborhood councils and the City infrastructure to support those councils is considered. Once GE agrees upon a structure, any proposal to implement neighborhood councils should include consideration of starting with a Citywide pilot project.

The third motion, for the CLA and CAO to work with various City departments to present a proposal and time line to create the DON within existing resources and examine the councils of other cities, as well as the fourth motion, to determine funding options for the DON will be addressed in detail in subsequent reports to GE. However, any funding considerations for the DON may also include a related discussion of departmental consolidation. The City Council is currently reviewing proposals to consolidate the housing, community development, community redevelopment and economic development activities. Including proposals for the DON in that discussion may be appropriate.

Recommendation

That staff submit, for consideration by the Governmental Efficiency Committee, a work plan with a time line for the investigation of and recommendations for the creation of neighborhood councils and the City infrastructure to support the councils.

Fiscal Impact Statement

There is no General Fund impact at this time. However, if the Committee secures the assistance of experts either local and/or from other cities, funding may be required.

KC:JOS:rnm

Recommendations for an Option Report on Neighborhood Councils

The report should encompass the following four components:

1) Description of proposals for neighborhood councils being put forth by members of the City Council, the Charter Reform Commissions, and other interested parties

The description should include a break-down of neighborhood council structural features and issues. These include the following:

- * Boundaries: i.e., district-wide, community, etc.
- * Size of council: how many members
- * Method of selecting members: appointed, elected, a mixed system
- * Participation: voting by citizens, residents, those who do business in the community, age requirements, etc.
- * Representation: sectors of a community: homeowner/renter groups, block clubs, civic associations, human service organizations, business organizations, religious institutions, schools, police and fire department advisory groups, other community groups and councils, etc
- * Scope of authority: grants of specific governmental responsibility, advisory, required-advisory (e.g., inclusion in the city's budget, planning, or environmental processes)
- * Scope of activities: economic development, land use, health care and safety issues; community enrichment, mediation, etc.
- * Staffing: civil service or exempt employees, support personnel, who participates in hiring (councils or a central office of neighborhoods)
- * Funding: sources of funding as well as possible costs, non-governmental funds, etc.
- * Office of Neighborhoods: scope of its activities (providing logistical support, coordinating neighborhood activities performed by city government, hiring and training staff, communications,

2) Procedural issues that must be addressed include:

- * How neighborhood councils are to be created in Los Angeles: ordinance or charter amendment.
- * How the city is to explore what works and what doesn't work, retaining sufficient flexibility as we gain experience.
- * What the relationship of the neighborhood councils will be to the City Council, the Mayor, and the city departments (a separate issue from their engagement in the processes of city government such as budgeting.

3) The report should also consider some of the broader questions raised by neighborhood councils as a concept and how they relate to notions of urban democracy. These questions include:

- * How do we balance the need for the city to speak with one voice and — at the same time enable its residents to feel that they have control over their own lives?
- * What is the relationship between "representative" democracy (as characterized by the city council and citywide offices of mayor, city attorney and controller) and participatory" democracy as characterized by notions of town meetings and neighborhood councils?
- * How will neighborhood councils increase accountability of all of the players in local government? What will be their relationship with the council, the mayor, and city departments?
- * Should the neighborhood councils be political mechanisms for bringing together different communities within a neighborhood council district and among different neighborhoods; or should it be a governmental structure, bringing local government closer to the local level?
- * What are realizable goals for neighborhood councils? Teaching residents how city government works and empowering them to make it can work for them? Working as a mechanism that can incorporate new immigrant populations into the American political structure? Working as a mechanism that can bring different communities within the city together? Protecting neighborhoods from changes that too often mean the destruction of a sense of community? Providing a training ground for new leaders in an age of term limits?

4) The report should be based on a study of other cities as well as the recommendations of neighborhood council advocates within the city. But it should also consider what makes Los Angeles different.

- * What is the impact of size, multi-ethnic diversity, a large immigrant population,
- * a changing economic structure that is apt to be dominated by small business rather than large manufacturing corporations,
- * an economy that is perhaps more global in its reach and its expectations than any city in the world?

The governing structure of Los Angeles is a classic Progressive structure that sought to disperse power. It succeeded, and became even more complex than city fathers ever imagined with the overlay of regulations and mandates by regional, state, and federal governments. How will neighborhood councils play in the current structure, and how might they be affected by a new charter that might alter the size and functions of the city council, and its relationship to the Mayor.