

# REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

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February 13, 1998

TO: Honorable Members of the  
Governmental Efficiency Committee

FROM: Ronald F. Deaton *RFD*  
Chief Legislative Analyst

## Office of Neighborhoods

Your Committee has asked this Office to make recommendations for initial actions which will facilitate the intent of the motions contained on the above referenced files. Those files propose the creation of an Office of Neighborhoods, a system of neighborhood councils, and a citywide neighborhood congress. The motions share the same basic intent of maximizing the delivery of public services to our neighborhoods, enhance community participation and improving the quality of life.

Any effort by the City to develop a program which incorporates this approach to government in Los Angeles will require the efforts of an entity having the ability to focus on this task separate and apart for any other duties and responsibilities. As a result, we feel that a necessary first step for any initiative in this area is the creation of an Office charged with this responsibility.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. REQUEST the City Attorney, with the assistance of the Chief Legislative Analyst and the City Administrative Officer to prepare, for consideration by the Committee, a draft ordinance creating an "Office of Neighborhoods" ("Office"), such Office to be charged with the following general duties and responsibilities:
  - A. Develop recommendations for a system of neighborhood councils throughout the City which will include the following as the initial steps in the establishment of such a system:
    1. A system of selecting the initial neighborhood council members which

does not require the creation of districts subject to federal law.

2. A target of 50 to 70 separate neighborhoods, each with populations ranging from 50,000 to 70,000.
  3. A set of responsibilities for councils that allows each to address issues internal to their respective neighborhoods and communicating problems, concerns, and needs to the City.
- B. Providing support, information and other resources to neighborhoods seeking to establish councils.
  - C. Serve as the contact for those seeking information regarding City services, including the coordination of inquiries received.
  - D. Develop the specifics of and coordinate a program whose goal would be the establishment of a network of mini-City halls in various areas of the City in order to provide more convenient access to necessary City services, e.g. building permits, planning information.
2. Direct the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the City Administrative Officer, to prepare and submit to Committee their recommendations regarding other actions which are necessary to move forward with the establishment of an Office of Neighborhoods, including those related to:
    - A. Staffing, budget, salaries, and appropriate placement of the Office within the City's bureaucratic structure, with particular emphasis on:
      1. Hiring a Director for the new Office; determining the appropriate salary range for the Director position and the number and classification of the position(s) deemed necessary to provide appropriate support staff for the Office; and developing an initial budget for the Office.
      2. Development of the Council's initial instructions to the Office for preparation of a work plan, for Council approval, detailing the necessary administrative steps, procedures, policies, and future Mayor/Council actions necessary for the operation of the Office.
      3. Appropriate instructions to other City departments, offices and bureaus to designate a staff member who will function as liaison to the Office and to provide that information to the Director.

Council should declare as part of its action in establishing the Office its intent to modify the purposes and responsibilities and duties based on the information and recommendations developed by the Director.

## DISCUSSION:

One of the motions involved in this proposes the creation of an Office of Neighborhoods. Regardless of any final decisions regarding the specifics of a system of neighborhood councils for the City, an Office of Neighborhoods will be required to provide information, resources and other support for those involved in neighborhood councils, and to provide some centralized office to coordinate the activities in this area. The Council needs to create a mechanism for focusing City efforts toward the development of an effective system for communication between City government and the local neighborhoods and coupled with the means of delivering the appropriate and necessary support for communities seeking to be involved in this new program. In view if this, we feel that the most effective first step in addressing the issues raised in these motions is the creation of such an office.

The initial duties and responsibilities of that Office will focus on developing a centralized point of contact for inquires and information. This Office would generally follow the intent of Councilwoman Chick's motion since it would coordinate City services and resources available to neighborhoods. It's initial mandate would be to provide information and coordination for community based efforts such as graffiti removal, tree planting, code enforcement.

The mandate given this Office, at least in its initial phase, should be very general in nature with its activities following primarily the development and coordination of three interrelated programs. The first would be the creation of a one-stop, single contact point for persons, including taking reports of neighborhood non-emergency problems, e.g. pot hole repair, dead animal pick up, and providing information on City services such as graffiti removal, the volunteer program. Secondly, the Office would work to create a program of mini-city halls to provide more reasonable convenient access to necessary City offices. And lastly, the Office would develop recommendations for the establishment of a Citywide system of neighbor councils. The Director would examine and, where appropriate, make recommendations regarding alternative approaches to the establishment of such councils. This would include such basic issues as: the manner in which boundaries should be established; the appropriate number of councils; the method of selecting their members (i.e. appointment or election); the role these neighborhood councils will play; and the type and level of City support and resources that can and should be made available to them.

Within each of these larger issues are a myriad of sub-issues which will drive much of the discussion on this program. For example, any consideration of electing council members must address such questions of at-large vs. by-district voting; the process for nomination; majority or plurality vote required for election; requirements for seeking office other than residency in the area; how will election be held; would each district have to be equal in population; and would boundaries have to be contained entirely within a single CD or could they cross CD lines. It is this myriad of issues and sub-issues which we feel warrants the creation of this new office.

In order to move forward with the creation of neighborhood councils while these long term issues are addressed, we are suggesting that the City Council initially commit to a system of 50 to 70 neighborhood councils. Externally, each Council would serve as a point of contact

with the City government facilitating the communication of needs, problems, and opinions regarding issues facing the neighborhood to the appropriate City agency. Internally, the council would provide the means for each neighborhood to develop a collective vision for the community it serves. It would be an accessible and open forum for residents to express their opinions on their local community issues and debate the viewpoints of the various constituencies included within a neighborhood.

As head of the Office of neighborhoods, its Director will serve two roles. On one hand, the Director would serve as a manager who would (a) administer an office designed to function as a one stop public information resource for the public; (b) coordinate and provide support services for a Citywide neighborhood council system; (c) promote the creation of a network of mini-city halls throughout the City. At the same time, the Director will serve as the key advisor to the City Council in developing these programs.

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