

To: Joel
From: Greg
Re: Charter Commission Meeting - NCs

11-20-97

Went to the evening meeting of the appointed Charter Commission last night (Wed) because it was the first meeting devoted to NCs.

SUMMARY:

The other meeting on NCs will be Nov 25, but it may not be worth having you address the commission at this time.

It was clear that the commission had little use for half-baked ideas. They just don't have the time to hear the seeds of a plan, and then it together themselves. They need as much specificity as possible.

They seemed baffled by the variety of proposals presented to them. One thing they have to decide is how much they want to put in the Charter regarding NCs -- detailing a system, providing enabling legislation within certain parameters, etc.

I couldn't get many hints from the questions the commissioners asked of the speakers, how they felt about the issue. It was as if they were just hearing another in a long line confusing issues.

RAPHE:

Raphe started the discussion with a sharp and concise explanation of the issues before the commission. He pointed out the conflict of designed NCs by council district vs. communities of interest. They did a little research re: St. Paul, Portland, NYC. He said that the public seemed to be more satisfied with moderate forms of NC plans.

He added the most important lesson, in his opinion, that has been learned over the years is that a cooperative relationship between the public and government is most important. It can't be a system in which one side wins and another loses.

MRT:

MRT was the first of 3 featured speakers. He spoke on his empowerment councils, including Q&A. He noted that some of his colleagues have told him that his model cannot work in all parts of the city, especially in the Valley. He cautioned against copying systems from other cities because each system should be unique to its environment. He acknowledged the difference of opinion of CD boundaries vs. community boundaries. Said we need to experiment. Let the system develop on its own. It's hard to recind power once you give it.

His goal is convene neighborhood congresses all over the city. His estimate was that we could do it for \$3M, but he admitted that this was pretty much a wild guess. He told the commissioner all the time and money he put into starting his councils.

HAYDEN:

Said that during the Mayor's race, a polling form not connected with his campaign, asked the public how they felt about NCs with power over planning and zoning decisions. Results were: 46% strong OK, 33% somewhat OK, 8% somewhat opposed, and 6% strongly opposed.

Most people want their neighborhoods to have a village atmosphere, but they want the benefits of a large city. If we just shifted authority from the legislative to executive, we would continue to divide the city, and maybe fuel secession. He said he was sensitive to the arguments that a system which gives direct power to the people could further slow down the process and create a Tower of Babel.

NCs should be funded and sanctioned by the city. He said they can now participate more than ever before through "Internet democracy" -- being able to communicate and participate in hearings through the Internet, cable TV, etc., without leaving their homes.

NCs must go beyond being advisory. We already have lots of those. Participants eventually burnout.

Must elect the leaders. Can't appoint. NCs would petition the city for recognition. Could have 4-5 boroughs, but could also have 34 districts (the number of planning districts.) Must have city funding so they can afford storefronts, equipment, staff, and consultants such as geologists.

Don't necessarily need a larger Council. Council needs more of a citywide vision. Currently there is little incentive for councilmembers to have a citywide vision. Maybe elect some members at large.

Full City Council should be able to override decisions of NCs by a super majority. OK to allow non-citizens to vote in NC elections.

JON SHAUGHNESSY

Jon is part of the Neighborhood Councils Movement, the first group we started working with in 1992. Part of the old Gerry Brown group.

His people are unanimous. Don't want another advisory group. Need real power, but don't expect dictatorial power.

Boundaries should represent neighborhoods that define themselves. Should not be by CDs because they change at least every 10 years.

Due to size of L.A., probably best to have 2-tiered system like Portland. Districts within which there are neighborhood councils. Keep neighborhoods under 30K population. Everyone should be able to walk to their neighborhood meeting. If you have to take the freeway, it isn't a neighborhood meeting.

Each NC needs funding for storefront and staff. Elected members would serve without pay. Among his members, there was no consensus on whether or not business owners should be allowed to participate, and whether or not non-citizens should be able to vote.

NCs should do lots of the micro-managing, while the full City Council legislates. MRT's system was the

best that could be done within the existing structure of government. But we need a different structure.

NCs petition for recognition. (Wasn't clear if they petition to a city agency or a separate political entity of some sort.) There is decision-making at district and neighborhood levels. Planning and land use powers must be given. Isn't sure to what extent the NCs should get into service delivery.

He noted that you tried your best to get the NCs started, but failed, so now the next hope is the commission.

JOYCE PRAGER -- VICA

Her plan had so many unanswered questions that Kiefer commented that they should go back to the drawing boards, work with other groups, and refine the idea. The commission simply didn't have the time to develop their idea.

Since the plan left open a lot of options, it was difficult to understand what it really was. She told me afterwards that she put together the plan on her own time. The commission asked if the VICA board approved it, and she said that they approved the plan, but the specifics are still fluid.

The commissioners questioned the ability of the town councils to raise taxes given the Prop 218 restrictions. Another commissioner questioned the wisdom of expecting the council members to serve without pay on the local level. Another wondered what the additional cost would be to have city staff attending 34 evening town council meetings. One of their options would create 82 town councils.

Marquettie Archie raised a question about whether or not the ability of an NC to raise additional taxes through assessments or whatever in their own area could mean that the richer areas might then have better services than poorer areas.

Prager suggested that the town councils be given the ability to contract for services. She gave the example of the people living near Calabassas being able to contract with Calabassas for police service in order to get faster response time than they would get from the LAPD.

A commissioner asked if the Metro Council (the body made up of presidents of the town councils which would replace the current City Council) would be the one to settle disputes involves projects that cover more than town council.

NOV 25 MEETING

Diane Linn, who runs Portland's Office of Neighborhoods, will be one of the speakers next week.

COMMENTS:

This is what we're going to experience if we take the GE Cmt on the road. There will be people who want to design the system to help them accomplish a win -- the very thing that Raphe rightfully warned against. Some people have spent their lives fighting for a particular cause, and they're tired of losing. So they want a system that empowers them to actually make the decisions, at the exclusion of people with different points of view. I feel that we have to pursue of policy of inclusion if we are to be

successful.

It was interesting to note that none of the speakers presented any plan that was the product of conversations with the diverse interests of the city. There was no plan developed by homeowners, business people and renters.

Those who wanted direct powers never addressed the issues of what level of responsibility they were willing to take. It's as if they want the ability to veto a zone change but not be the ones who will have to pay the bill if they lose in court. In any system, there has to be clear lines of responsibility.

Unfortunately, the City Atty has never weighed in on the legal limitations that would be involved with giving direct power to NCs. That would probably narrow the discussion. Does state law prohibit certain land use decisions from being made by NCs? Can an NC create liability for the city? Who determines what is a local issue or a citywide issue? Is the building of an arena a citywide issue to be handled by a full City Council? Does it only become a citywide issue if the city taxpayers have to subsidize it?

All of this helped me with my next task of shaping a plan for the GE Cmt. Clearly, the commission isn't going to be able to design a system. We're going to have to give them something as specific as possible, and urge them to include it in their recommendations.