

To: Joel
From: Greg
Re: GE Cmt Meeting - Wednesday

4-20-98

On Wednesday, I suggest that we spend our time getting right down to the crux of the two major issues.

I suggest that we start by seeing if the committee can more clearly define what they feel this system of NCs should do.

Because we have not campaigned for a clear vision of what we want, everyone else has been left to express their opinions based upon their perceptions and misconceptions. The example was the CAO's initial proposal that he produced when pressed by the charter commission.

Another example was the response from Burt Pines, Carol Schatz, and the others when I quickly resolved their two main fears about funding NIMBYism and creating another layer of government.

SELECTION:

I think it's time to be blunt about the issue of how the leaders are selected.

Let's begin by getting clear on what the whole system is being designed to do.

If it's being designed to provide funding for groups of people who will advise council members and the mayor, then it really doesn't matter how many of the leaders are appointed because it's doomed from the start.

As long as we keep using the term advisory, some will continue to think it to be something that's toothless, and controlled in part or in whole by the people who are receiving the advice.

I think it's time for others outside of our small staff circle to understand that we want the city to support independent community groups that represent their diverse interests by giving them the money, staff, offices, equipment, and training to become as strong a lobbying force at City Hall as the professional lobbyists.

These groups should exist to keep our feet to the fire, to hold us accountable, and to make demands of us. That's what grassroots democracy is all about. No one would describe Cerrell (he has had a rep at our meetings) as advisory. Or Latham & Watkins. Or the city unions.

If the committee members don't agree with that goal, let them explain why.

If they do agree, but they still think that some leaders should be appointed, let them explain why they think that the people in Los Angeles are somehow more dysfunctional than those in the other model cities. If the councils in the other cities can be self-selected, why is it, committee members, that you have so little faith in our people to do the same?

By having even some people appointed (and I assume by folks like the council members) we're saying

that we're for community empowerment and grassroots democracy, but not totally.

Picture this scenario: The city starts the program, and one or more communities pop up and say that they're ready to go. They have the diverse leadership, the plan, everything. We'd have to tell them that we couldn't accept all their leaders because City Hall had already decided that we have to make some appointments because we really don't think they can do it themselves. That's an insult! And the community that is most likely to be ready to go on Day One is CD8.

So we have to start somewhere. If we start with appointing some of the leaders, we're saying from the start that we don't think community empowerment can work as it has worked in other cities. And it may be difficult to change. I'm making a Monday morning call to Boston where he says the NC plan failed because it started with appointed leaders, and lost so much credibility that it couldn't begin a self-select system.

Let's suggest to the committee that we design a system that assumes the optimum -- one that assumes that we really can succeed as others have succeeded -- one that expresses optimism and trust in our residents -- one that offers maximum public participation and strength.

Then, during the committee and Council discussions, changes can be recommended to it if desired. But then the challenge will be on the committee or council members to publicly explain why they have such little trust in the public.

There will be an argument that appointed members aren't that bad because they're working at the charter reform level. Everyone should remember, however, that the proposal to create that commission languished for 6 years in committee until Riordan's initiative forced its creation. That's hardly an indication that the Council is anxious to hear from the public on important issues.

Appointments would only have a chance of working if two things happened: (1) the public didn't perceive it as a slap at their independence, an attempt at City Hall control or influence, and (2) those doing the appointing truly wanted the whole system to work. Since some council members loathe the idea of NCs, there's an excellent chance that they would appoint people who would try and control the group for their own political reasons. Although it's possible that self-selecting could produce duds, at least the community had a chance, and the duds are their duds.

Summary

This plan has to be something you believe in. Otherwise, you can't sell it to the public, and your credibility goes down the drain in the eyes of some people. I'd rather keep fighting for something you believe in and keep losing, than give in on a meaningful point and win.

We could go fight for it at the charter commission level.

Possible Alternative #1

Begin the system with self-selection. If some neighborhoods can't find leadership acceptable to the City Council and Mayor (or whomever recognizes the groups), and the Office of Neighborhoods can't find leadership in the neighborhoods, then provide the option of temporary appointments to the organizing

committees. The appointments could possibly be made by the Office of Neighborhoods.

By the way, I think we should use the term "organizing committees" to describe those community council leaders who will get the city's initial funding. The term indicates that they are there just until there are enough neighborhood councils to elect them, and it indicates that their primary function at the outset is going to be to organize their community into NCs.

Possible Alternative #2

I'm not sure I'm not comfortable with it.

Allow the appointment, initially, of the professional staff, but self-select the board members.

This might intrigue some of the council members who might see it more important to appoint the people who are actually spending full time in the community, and that would get us by implementing the program. But, out those staff would have to ultimately do what the board members tell them to do, or be replaced.

But you always have to have a system in which the board members control their staff.

BOUNDARIES:

Could use the 35 planning districts, and give everyone their fair share of funding. It might work. It resolves Deaton's concern that because of the tremendous size differentials, many communities, would scream. We'd have to figure out what to do with the two small central city planning districts.

Earlier I had given you a plan showing how we could fuse together some of the small planning districts, and subdivide some larger ones, and still have about 35. The planning districts in CD8 are so large that we just might be able to carve out an area using CD8 boundaries as one district.

If we design by council district, here's what will happen. A person lives near a particular park. It's his neighborhood park. He grew up playing there. His kids play there. He volunteers at the park. He volunteers on his community council to decide how development money is spent at the park. Now it's 2001, and reapportionment causes the boundary of his council district to be drawn somewhere else. Now he doesn't live in that council district anymore. He can't participate as he did in his park because somebody drew a political boundary down another street. His neighborhood park isn't his neighborhood park anymore, according to City Hall.

If we want people to commit themselves to their neighborhoods, we have to commit City Hall to neighborhoods. That commitment begins with this issue of boundaries.

OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

We have to decide how much of the details we want to leave up to the Office of Neighborhoods, and how they will appear on the city's org chart.

Most cities include the Office inside an existing department, usually planning, or community

development.

I suggest making them an independent office, I guess like the CAO. The director is appointed by the Council and Mayor, so there=s accountability. No commission.

The biggest problem with putting them under an existing department is this scenario: It=s an Office under say the Planning Department. The community organizers are going into neighborhoods organizing the residents, mediating disputes, learning how to lobby, doing the things that many council members want to be the only ones doing. Worried council members go to the Planning Director privately and threaten to tear apart his department unless he controls these trouble-makers. Rather than risk the rest of his department, his primary mission, and his job, he sacrifices the Office of Neighborhoods. It=s all going to fail when the community calls up for help, and the staff can=t do anything because they=ve been told to cool it. That=s government from the top down.

If the Office is independent, any attack can=t come through the back door like that. And it=s director should be someone who isn=t afraid to lose his or her job, because that will likely be the case.