

To: Joel
From: Greg
Re: GE Cmt- Friday
Neighborhood Councils

4-30-98

The GE Cmt meeting is set for 2:15 p.m.

The basic problem with our staff reports is that we aren't specific enough in telling them what we want. Since we haven't told staff to take the lead on this issue, they're taking their instructions from the committee or us, and we haven't been real specific.

I had a long talk with the CAO today. As a result, here are some thoughts and conclusions I've reached.

BOUNDARIES:

I still don't know why we're using council districts as the starting point for designing the regions. But if it makes somebody happy, and we can make adjustments based on common sense, neighborhood requests, and keeping neighborhoods together, it should work.

Otherwise, I go to some version of community planning districts since they do a better job of respecting communities of interest.

I hope the assumption is that these boundaries wouldn't change as the result of reapportionment.

SELECTION:

The last of the potential major dispute areas.

My preference, as it has always been, is to challenge those who will petition the city for recognition and funding to present a plan for how they plan to do the things the city wants to be done, such as selecting their leaders, involving their whole community, organizing the neighborhoods, etc. Let the creativity of the communities flow, and let them design what's best for them.

We can look at those proposals and decide if each one is worth taking a chance on.

For those who want appointments, let's suggest that we start with this optimistic approach, and if it doesn't work then we can consider some appointments.

EARLY WARNING ORDINANCE:

In our motion, I listed some possible actions that would probably be included in an early warning ordinance. I stole from St. Paul and added some things I thought up. In order for the City Atty to draft this ordinance, we need to know four things:

1. Which actions should be included?
2. Which level, regional or neighborhood, should be sent which notice?
3. Who should be responsible for sending each notice?
4. What additional information does the City Atty need from the Council?

I suggest that we instruct the Clerk to draft a letter to all city agencies telling them about the ordinance, and ask for their suggestions and input. Give them a deadline. Give them a person to call with questions. This would seem a lot easier than assigning a staff person to call up each agency and ask. Give our staff the suggestion that they might have to hold an informational meeting for all city agencies to answer all their concerns at once.

City staff can assemble the responses, and the GE Cmt can provide the instructions to the City Atty.

FINDING OFFICE SPACE:

The previous staff report should be amended to say that we=re going to establish offices, not in 5 places throughout the city, but in 15, and City Hall. CAO agrees with this, and after the last meeting, I assume Deaton does too.

OFFICE FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT:

As a result of the City Hall move, we have tons of surplus furniture in storage. As an extra incentive for regions to get organized quickly, furniture should be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

I told ITA not to throw any computer equipment that is replaced.

The Clerk should also be instructed to notify all departments that they shouldn=t be throwing away anything that the NCs might be able to use, even if temporarily.

COMMISSION:

One thing that all staff agreed upon was that the suggestion of a departmental commission was well-intentioned but perhaps unnecessary.

With a regular A@top-down@ department, it is possible to make the argument that we need a commission to provide some sort of citizen control or input. But we=re talking about a truly unique A@bottom-up@ department. We have to think in a new way. The purpose of the DON is to support the regional and neighborhood councils. The community leaders become the commission in essence.

With a commission, the lines of accountability become blurred and confused. And once again, there will be so many people in charge, that nobody will be in charge or accountable.

If I were a community leader, I would be concerned that the DON would be getting

conflicting instructions and guidelines from the commissioners, who most likely would be appointed by the Mayor.

If you believe in community empowerment, you have to believe that the strength of the DON will come from, and must come from, the neighborhoods.

I think that some were suggesting that the DON could more easily ward off attacks from council members if they had a set of important people on the commission fighting for them. But the opposite could be the case. What if the commissioners were people, because of who appointed them, people who weren't true believers, and who wanted to ensure that the neighborhoods don't upset the elected officials who appointed them?

The idea of using the commissioners to pick the executive director would involve creating an entirely new departmental structure. Normally, the department head and the commissioners are selected by a process involving the Mayor and Council. That provides for a process of accountability, merit review, and removal. If some special commission were created to pick the department head, would it require a Charter change? Who would do merit review?

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS:

For reasons that aren't clear to me, the CAO wants to call this the Department of Neighborhoods as opposed to the Office. It would be DON instead of ON.

The first step will be to commit the city's budget to enough money to give the program a fighting chance. It's easier to come back for more money if you've got a success that needs to grow, than to come back to support something that's failing.

Then the DON would be created and staffed. The CAO report recommends an executive director (GM), an assistant, a senior clerk typist, and a management analyst.

The recommendation is now for 15 project coordinators/community organizers, and 15 clerk typists to staff the 15 offices.

CLA says this can still be all done under the same budget they proposed because everyone won't be hired at the same time. This worries me, because I'm not sure it's enough.

At a minimum, we need to establish the DON with the people they need to put together the detailed plan that Council will be asked to approve. Since the type of people needed to design a system like this might be different than the ones you would need to implement it, I think that the DON should begin with adequate funds to hire consultants or temporary help for the design work.

Once the plan is approved by the Council, the DON will need to hire community organizers to begin helping the communities prepare their proposals. The people will have to be trained in the skills needed to do the job. When applying for the jobs, they will have to be aware that once the regional councils are formed, they will determine who their staff will be, so either their job will be temporary or they will have to earn the respect of the community

so they will be retained.

The question is how many people are needed to get this part done. If the Council agrees to a budget, and a first year plan for say 15 community organizers and whatever, the DON can start off small and grow as needed in an orderly manner.

The DON need an executive director. I suggest that person be selected using the normal Mayor/Council process. The Mayor can, of course, choose to follow any suggestions of the Council that a special task force be formed to help with the selection and evaluation process. That group could be comprised of the charter commissioners who are working on the issue, rep from business, rep from labor, homeowners, ethnic groups, whomever.

The executive director would hire the assistant.

CAO is suggesting that the senior clerk typist and management analyst for the City Hall office come from civil service. I question the need for a full-time MA. I'm getting sent a description of what this kind of person does. If it involves doing bureaucrat work such a budget, personnel matters, etc., I don't think there will be enough work initially to support a full-time person unless that person is also skilled enough and willing enough to do all the other work that is needed.

I'd rather reduce the amount of time that we need from an MA at the start, and add more clerical support so the phones can be answered and the public be served beyond the normal 9 to 5.

There's a chicken and egg problem with the community organizers. You need some number of them at the start to work with each community. But ultimately they must be accountable to the regional councils.

Since we've decided to start with 15 areas that roughly approximate council districts, you just know that each council member will want to pick that person. I suggest that the executive director be able to hire these exempt employees as needed, but with each one understanding that once the regional council is recognized and funded, staff will be their decision.

Initially, we don't need 15 offices. From the start, you simply cannot send the community organizers into the field to do what they wish. They're going to have to begin at a City Hall, which in reality means office space at 650 S. Spring. From there they train together, gain a common sense of mission, and then gradually begin going out into the field. At some point, the executive director will determine that it's time to open an office. That may not be until the regional council is recognized.

My other concern with this budget is that it only provides money for one citywide mailing. I imagine that at least one citywide mailing will be needed to announce the program. Then each regional council will need money in the beginning to do the additional mailings that are needed to organize the region into NCs, and arrange elections of the regional council leaders.

Each citywide mailing has been assumed to cost \$300,000. That's a ledger-sized,

folded, self-mailer with no complicated graphics or pictures. If we could get creative and, for instance, contract with someone to print the newsletter and sell advertising in it, we might be able to do this at no cost like that NC in St. Paul did. And this might provide an example for the regional councils themselves as they figure out how to print their own newsletters.

FIELD OFFICES:

I feel that the funding for the field offices is inadequate. One professional staff, and one clerical won't allow the office to be open and accessible long enough. At least, they need a middle-range person who can cover the phones at lunch time, keep the office open at night, and do community organizing.

Our staff will argue that since we can't get all these offices up and running at the same time, that we can staff the first offices this way, and then come back for more money. My first thought was that we should earmark all the money we need from the start. Then I realized what wasn't being said in public B it would be impossible for us get 8 offices up and running, and then deny funding for the other 7.

I would still do it the first way unless the dollar amount really becomes the issue.

THE KEY

The CAO said that the key was finding an executive director who could get the job done. Someone who could earn the respect of the communities, and be able to deal with the politics at City Hall.