

8-9-98

Dear Advisors:

The possible creation of a system of neighborhood/advisory councils in Los Angeles is picking up steam. The Elected Charter Reform Commission restructured itself because its remaining issues narrowed. It appears that NCs will be their last issue. As part of the restructuring, the old committees were abolished, and Bill Weinberger, a very level-headed, fair, thoughtful and considerate attorney, is chairing the new task force that is in charge of the NC issue. Bennett Kayser remains on as one of the 5 members. Councilman Wachs and I are very pleased. We also have a new senior policy staffer who is from New York. I'm busy educating him on the difference between what they have in NYC and what real neighborhood empowerment is. I think he's getting it.

The Wachs plan is developing like this: create a Dept. of Neighborhoods in the City Charter. (We'll continue to try and get the City Council to do all this, but we're not optimistic.) Begin with a small staff and about 38 community organizers on contract. Let them spend \_\_\_ months identifying neighborhood leadership, helping them organize, and identifying neighborhood boundaries. Toward the end of the process, they will work with the identified neighborhood leadership to (1) temporarily expand the boundaries of the organized neighborhoods to include the as yet unorganized adjacent areas, and (2) begin clustering neighborhoods into 38 (or a number to be determined) communities (about 95,000 residents each). The neighborhoods and their clusters, with the help of the DON organizers, would petition the city for recognition. There would be few requirements, but they would include a guarantee that the diverse interests in the area would continue to be represented, and that every stakeholder is an equal participant. The city would provide funding to staff and maintain 38 offices. The leaders of the community councils (clusters) would be selected by the neighborhood councils. The process for doing all this would be included in their petitions to the City, and therefore would become a contractual agreement.

Enough background. Today I have four questions.

1. When I'm in conversation with people, which definition should I give to what a neighborhood is? I've been using some like: that geographic area within which I regularly conduct my social, personal, and family activities, and within which changes (street closures, malfunctioning traffic signals, parades, etc. affect me.
2. Should the city give the 38 community councils the choice of hiring their own staff or letting them select from city staff which the city would hire? Or should it be done the same way for each community council?
3. To the extent that the city gives each community council a budget to maintain their office and get their work done, should the community council send the bills to the city for review afterwards (to make sure they didn't spend it on trips to the Bahamas), or should they get approval beforehand, or should it be

some combination of the two depending on the type of expenditure?

4. Should community council leaders be allowed to pay themselves money even if it's a small stipend?  
Should they or their immediate family members be prohibited from benefitting financially in anyway?

Thanks.

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