

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: May 29, 1998

TO: J. Michael Carey  
City Clerk

FROM: Kristin F. Heffron, Chief  
Election Division

SUBJECT: Neighborhood Council Election Modified Cost Estimate

Background

Based on the information provided by you, we used the following assumptions to estimate the costs of adding the election of Neighborhood Councils to a regular primary election.

**Assume 15 districts with 5 members per neighborhood council**

Assumptions:

1. One Neighborhood Council for each district with 5 persons comprising the council, with each of the 5 elected from one of 5 sub-districts of the council district.
2. All voters in each sub-district will vote for one Neighborhood Council District
3. Majority vote, with 50% of the sub-districts having a run-off election
4. At least one run-off in each Council District
5. Average of four candidates per sub-district
6. Existing Council District and Precinct boundaries will be honored (no changes, splits or overlapping districts)

Based on these assumptions, the following process assumptions can be drawn:

1. Due to Neighborhood Council areas, approximately 20% more voting precincts than in 1997
2. Approximately 120 ballot groups if all Neighborhood Council are elected at the same time
3. Ballots will contain approximately 1 page for each Neighborhood Council race
4. Assume a 50% drop-off rate from filing to ballot
5. Assume 600 proposed candidates; 300 to qualify with enough signatures.
6. Assume signature requirements are changed to only 100 signatures, with 200 in-lieu of filing fees. Then signature checking will require in excess of 30 people working full time for 15 days to validate signatures. *This is a concern in the process when added to the existing candidate processing.*
7. 1.4 million total registered voters
8. Same turnout as April 1997
9. Ethics provisions undetermined and therefore not estimated

## Major Concerns:

1. Number of candidates
2. Number of unique ballot groups when incorporated into an existing election
3. Number of signatures required and the checking of signatures within the existing election code time frames
4. Increased number of precincts to honor Neighborhood Council area boundary lines in addition to Council District and School District boundary lines.

Based on these assumptions and logical extensions, placing all candidates on an existing city-wide ballot would cost approximately \$700,000 for the primary election over the cost of the basic ballot.

## **Assume 21 districts with 5 members per neighborhood council**

### Assumptions:

1. One Neighborhood Council for each district with 5 persons comprising the council, with each of the 5 elected from one of 5 sub-districts of the council district.
2. All voters in each sub-district will vote for one Neighborhood Council District
3. Majority vote, with 50% of the sub-districts having a run-off election (costs not estimated)
4. At least one run-off in each Council District (costs not estimated)
5. Average of four candidates per sub-district
6. New Council District boundaries would have to be drawn with an unknown impact on LAUSD boundaries, and unknown cost for boundary changes.
7. Precinct boundaries will be honored (no changes, splits or overlapping districts)

Based on these assumptions, the following process assumptions can be drawn:

1. Due to Neighborhood Council areas, additional precincts would be necessary, but given the redrawing of district boundary lines, the number of precincts is difficult to determine. For purposes of estimating, the same general increase of approximately 20% more voting precincts than in 1997 is being used.
2. Approximately 150 ballot groups if all Neighborhood Council are elected at the same time
3. Ballots will contain approximately 1 page for each Neighborhood Council race
4. Assume a 50% drop-off rate from filing to ballot
5. Assume 840 proposed candidates; 420 to qualify with enough signatures.
6. Assume signature requirements are changed to only 100 signatures, with 200 in-lieu of filing fees. Then signature checking will require in excess of 40 people working full time for 15 days to validate signatures. *This is a major concern in the process when added to existing candidate workload.*
7. 1.4 million total registered voters
8. Same turnout as April 1997
9. Ethics provisions undetermined and therefore not estimated

The estimated cost for conducting the primary election for 21 neighborhood councils in each of 21 council districts is approximately \$800,000.

## Discussion of complexities and possible problems (applicable to both scenarios)

The major problems are the processing of the number of candidates in the existing time frames using the existing election procedures, and the increase in the number and complexity of the ballot groups and sample ballot groups when incorporating the Neighborhood Council into the existing election structure.

#### A. Candidates

Looking at these two issues separately, the number of candidates for the Neighborhood Council positions can be overwhelming. In estimating the number of candidates for the first election, we used as a model the candidate pool for the 1997 elected Charter Commission positions. While there were variances by district, the total number of candidates filing initially was 111, with 52 actually completing all processes and making it to the ballot, for an average of 3.5 candidates per office. That is more than a 50% drop off rate. However, for this election, the candidates were treated as all other candidates for purposes of qualifying for office. That is, they had a filing fee of \$300 with 500 valid signatures, or no filing fee and 1000 valid signatures. Also, there was only one office available per council district, with a limited term of office and elected for a single purpose. These conditions may not be the same for Neighborhood Council elections in which candidates may see the neighborhood council office as the first step in the forming of a career in elected office.

The number of candidates is currently estimated at between 600 and 840 or more for the first opening of the office to election. If requirements for qualifying for office remain the same as is stipulated for other elected offices, the sheer volume of candidates and signatures can overwhelm the ability of the office to function within the time frames required.

#### B. Sample Ballot Groups

A sample ballot group is a group of registered voters who are all receiving the same ballot style. In the April 1997 election, we had 36 sample ballot groups. That included at least one ballot group for each of the council districts, and in most cases multiple ballot groups for council districts when a district was split into two or more school district areas. With 5 neighborhood council areas for each council district, there would be a minimum of 75 ballot groups with nothing else on the ballot. Adding school district and council district races to the group delineations would increase the number of ballot groups considerably. We are estimating 120 sample ballot groups for estimating purposes. The impact this has on budgeting is the cost of printing the official sample ballot and the costs inherent in the preparation, processing and assembling of the supplies and the ballots for each of the precincts. When the number of ballot groups increases, the opportunities for human error also increases, which means that additional validation procedures are needed to minimize those errors.

The number of estimated ballot groups for an election for 21 districts with 5 neighborhood council positions open increases the basic number of ballot groups from 36 to 105, with additional groups to accommodate the school district elections. The actual number of ballot groups needed will depend on the drawing of the new boundary lines. However, an estimate of 150 ballot groups is being used as a rough approximation of the total number necessary assuming the boundary lines are drawn in the same manner as done before.

#### Preliminary Cost Estimates

Our very rough estimate, based on the above assumptions and qualifications, for conducting an election consolidated onto the City's regular April Primary Nominating Election for 15 Neighborhood Councils with 5 members to be elected within each of the 75 Neighborhood Council Districts, and incorporating

that race into a regular city election is approximately \$700,000. If the election for the Neighborhood Council offices was held separately, the cost would increase to approximately \$3.5 to \$4 million. The estimate for increasing the number to 21 neighborhood councils in each of 105 Neighborhood Council Districts is approximately \$800,000.

We are providing this rough estimate at your request. Significant work would need to be done in order to actually develop a reliable election estimate, including a much more detailed description of the neighborhood council program that will actually be considered. We also urge caution in using the figures provided. We have concerns that the significant candidate processing issues and election process issues could be effectively managed in conjunction with the regular elections, such that a separate election not consolidated with the City's regular elections may be required.