

To: Joel
From: Greg
Re: Appointed Charter Commission
Neighborhood Councils

7-22-98

I got to the Appointed Charter Commission meeting a little early so I could talk to some of the commissioners.

Raphe thought the way we prepared our handout was perfect.

I was able to speak to Doris Nelson and Jerry Gaines. Alex wasn't there.

In the end, we were able to get them to include our language on boundaries. Other issues they got confused about, and threw into the hands of their attorney, and other points they just ignored. As Raphe explained during the break, because we couldn't get our information to the commissioners beforehand, most of them didn't have time to understand what we were talking about.

Chamber rep said he had no problem with any of this -- the staff's recommendation or ours -- although when the business community spoke, they said the leaders should be appointed. I still think they mean they don't want them to have decision-making powers.

Doris Nelson said that the reason the focus groups probably indicated apathy toward NCs is because they were ignorant about what they could do. That same ignorance was apparent among the commissioners. They didn't clearly understand what we were calling for, and they certainly didn't understand what we envision NCs to be.

I spoke, but the 3 minutes went by so quickly that I was only able to explain our concept, and not get into the specific points. I made it clear that our system was needed whether or not we enlarged the City Council or had a formally elected group of community people with decision-making power. Both Julie Downey and Gordon Murley said I did a good job. That was interesting because Gordon and Barbara Fine had just gotten through saying that NCs had to have decision-making powers.

Mims: I spoke to one of the elected commissioners who went to a neighborhood conference recently (that was Bennett), and he said that he spoke to the cities with NCs and they weren't totally happy with them, and their ability to get things done.

Raphe: Our research shows that they are very pleased overall.

Doris Nelson: Staff proposal needed to be more specific. Council needed more guidance. Need to do a better job of identifying decisions that may potentially impact neighborhoods or area residents.

Sharon Shuster: As a community organizer, we need to go slow. NCs could have more power. Depends upon their credibility. Charter can only mandate a framework.

Luann Boylan: Don't understand how this changes anything.

Nelson: NCs are needed to hold LA together. People feel they have a lack of control over how things are handled.

Charlie Mims: Don't like calling them Acouncils.@ Too easy to confuse with City Council. Maybe Aneighborhood commissions.@ Should be elected by community planning districts, and be at the front end of planning and land use decisions.

George Kiefer: Commission has already made tentative decision to not give decision-making powers. Job today is to decide how much to put in the Charter to create an advisory system. Inappropriate for Charter to get into too much detail. LA is a long way from having an elected, decision-making system.

Anton: Need to mitigate frustration people have with the planning decisions. Maybe it=s better to address this through the Planning Commission, not in NCs. Maybe we need several regional planning commissions. Would be more democratic.

Henderson: Charter should require an ordinance that prescribes what kind of advisory power the NCs should have. (Unanimously approved).

Nelson: Need boundary language like Wachs proposed.

Kiefer: How about Arespect neighborhoods above political boundaries.@

Nelson: Don't see the distinction. Read the Wachs language.

Kiefer: Let=s direct staff to work out the language.

Henderson: I=m unsure about the language that says that we should encourage public participation Ato the greatest extent.@ This cause people to be overly-vigorous, and be concerned too much.

Kiefer: Let=s direct staff to include language that is consistent with other parts of the new Charter, such as regarding public participation in redistricting.

Nelson: Should change Apermits@ to Arequires@ formation of NCs throughout the city (what we recommended). We need to revisit this issue.

Kiefer: OK. Maybe the language is being interpreted differently. Don't want a situation in which it=s the city=s responsibility to replace a defunct NC.

Shuster: We could use a petition method, but then some areas will be left without NCs. We need a way to deal with that.

Gaines: The Wachs proposal says that everyone should have a chance to have an NC.

Mims: Concerned about the islands that would occur between NCs. And some of them could be really small, like a block. That=s not desirable. Don't know what it means that the governing boards shall be made up of the diverse interests. Need to leave this open to ordinance.

Raphe: Don't want rigid criteria. But need a framework so NCs can't limit who will participate.

Mims: Of course nothing prohibits the Council and Mayor from granting them decision-making power later on, and allowing them to be elected.

Stuart Kwoh: The issue is creating a system that provide the broadest possible participation.

Raphe: The spirit of the language is to have a sense of diversity of interest.

Kiefer: Why is the word Ageographic@ in there following Adiversity of interests?@

Mims: Maybe we should take out all that language (diversity and geography).

Kiefer: Should we be asking the GM of the DON to formulate the plan. Since that person will be appointed by the Mayor, shouldn't the Charter require the Mayor to do it through the department? (After discussion) Everyone seems OK with having the department do it.

Nelson: We don't say anything about resources for the NCs.

Kwoh: And we don't say that the DON is needed for continued support of the NCs. We need a plan of continued support.

Anton: We can put something into that part of the Charter that creates the DON.

Shuster: But that puts first call on city budget funds, and that=s a different issue.

Kiefer: Let=s look at that later.

Mims: Don't need to address resources, but state what they must do, and the city will have to provide the resources.

I spoke to staff afterwards.

If nothing else happens, staff writes Charter language based upon what they think the commission wanted, and it comes back in November.

But it is possible that the commission could revisit the issue before then.

It is my suggestion that we write a letter to the commission suggesting changes. We should make it as simple and direct as possible so it=s easy for the commissioners to take up the issue again. Want me to try and draft something?