

# MEMORANDUM

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To: *Elected* Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission  
Task Force on Structures of Government: Community Councils

From: Greg Nelson

Re: Budget for Community Councils

August 24, 1998

The CAO and Councilman Joel Wachs' office are presently developing a detailed budget estimate for the councilman's proposal for a citywide network of neighborhood councils and a Department of Neighborhoods (DON) as part of the Governmental Efficiency Committee's consideration of this issue. There has been a continuing refinement of the budget estimates that were part of CAO's report dated April 27, 1998, which has already been provided to you.

As a next step, the Task Force may want to consider which fundamental features of a neighborhood councils network should be included in the Charter, and which duties and responsibilities should be assigned to the DON. The Task Force may want to charge the DON with designing the details of neighborhood councils network. But with the Task Force's decisions, it should be possible to develop some fairly accurate estimates.

The Task Force should expect that at least four budgets will be developed:

1. One-time costs such as equipment.
2. Costs during the start-up or organizing period.
3. Pro-rated costs for the first fiscal year.
4. Annual costs thereafter.

Councilman Wachs has suggested the fundamental features that should be included in the Charter, so the integrity and effectiveness of the network would be guaranteed from the start, and protected thereafter from the actions of future city councils and mayors. Those that affect the budget are:

## Minimum Number of Communities

The Charter would require the City to create and fund clusters of neighborhoods called Acommunities, of approximately 100,000 persons each, so that there would be enough local offices to permit the neighborhood councils network to be effective. A Neighborhood Empowerment Commission, created within the Department of Neighborhoods, would certify, and decertify if necessary, the neighborhood and community councils.

The commission would be comprised of \_\_\_ current members of the charter reform commissions.

## Guaranteed Funding

As was done with the City Ethics Commission, the Charter should guarantee that the

neighborhood councils network including the Department of Neighborhoods be adequately funded (see Charter Section 603).

### Department of Neighborhoods

The Charter should require the creation of a Department of Neighborhoods (DON) that would assist the neighborhoods in organizing themselves into neighborhood councils, clustering themselves into community council areas of approximately 100,000 persons each, and thereafter continuing to provide them with support.

The DON will prepare a detailed plan for the creation of a citywide network of neighborhood councils for the purposes of promoting maximum public participation and civic engagement, promoting maximum neighborhood empowerment, and providing support to the community and neighborhood councils (A network councils@).

The duties of the DON shall include:

1. assisting the neighborhood leaders in preparing their petitions for recognition, identifying their boundaries, and organizing themselves;
2. assisting the network councils in learning the complexities of city government and assisting neighborhoods and neighborhood councils toward self-sufficiency;
3. arranging leadership, cultural awareness, dispute mediation, communications, and equipment training for network councils leaders;
4. arranging community empowerment training for city officials and employees;
5. arranging quarterly Congress of Neighborhoods meetings if requested to do so by the neighborhoods;
6. securing city in-kind support such as using the city purchasing contracts, acquiring surplus equipment, and printing and mailing materials;
7. assisting in preparing applications for non-profit status if requested;
8. creating and maintaining an internal and external information and communication network, including a citywide database of neighborhood organizations that would be available for public use;
9. identifying and receiving grants, gifts, and appropriations subject to the approval of the City Council, and assisting the network councils in securing same;
10. acting as City Hall=s neighborhood advocate on behalf of the network councils;
11. publishing a newsletter that is distributed to every stakeholder in the city at least three times a year;
12. hiring and/or administering community council staff if requested by the community councils;
13. providing information to the network councils as requested;
14. assisting the network councils with their elections or selection processes;
15. securing volunteers;
16. assisting the network councils design and implement a APrepare L.A. Plan@ for disaster preparedness;
17. having full charge and control of its department, being responsible for its proper administration, submitting annually a budget and expending the funds of the department, all as otherwise prescribed by law;
18. performing other duties and responsibilities directed by the City Council or Mayor.

Once the DON is created, most likely using General Fund money, it would begin developing

other funding alternatives to support its duties and responsibilities.

1. City General Fund. The network councils could easily recover the cost of themselves by stopping a single wasteful spending plan, or initiating or gaining support for a single cost reduction proposal.

2. Existing Government Grants. In communities that qualify, existing grant funds could be used to support a neighborhood councils network.

3. New Government Grants. From time-to-time, new grants are made available that could be used. It is also possible that special demonstration grants could be created solely for the purpose of supporting a neighborhood councils network in Los Angeles that would serve as a national model.

4. Private Foundation Grants. Private foundations are hesitant about providing funding support to government, but because many of them have a keen interest in community empowerment and betterment, it is very possible, for instance, to provide training through a non-profit organization that would secure a foundation grant. It is also possible that network councils might receive grants directly from foundations for special efforts.

5. Transfers from City Agencies. It might be determined that some functions within some city agencies are better performed within the DON. It is also possible that some city agencies may discover that the communications network of the neighborhood councils would allow them to perform new outreach functions. In Portland, the police department gave each neighborhood council enough money to hire a trained crime prevention specialist rather than do it themselves.

6. Underwriting. At least one neighborhood council in St. Paul hired a part-time person to publish their newsletter. He sold enough advertising to local merchants to completely pay for the publishing and mailing costs. It is possible that private interests might want to be involved in the same way in our city.

7. City In-kind Contributions. The CAO believes that there might be enough office space available so that the cost of securing office space may not have to be a budgeted expense. There should be enough furniture in storage, as a result of the relocation of several offices from City Hall, to furnish the community councils offices. The City may also be able to help the network councils with purchasing of supplies and equipment, printing, etc.

8. Money Raised on Own.