

Your question about the neighborhood councils is a common one. And it's a lot easier to explain verbally than to do in writing, but I'll give you something to chew on.

Fortunately, we aren't inventing anything new. This system has been working in some cities for over 20 years. I've visited St. Paul, and had long conversations with government and community leaders in other cities during the last four years.

At the base of the system is that the NCs work best when they are independent of City Hall. We can't trust them to solve their own problems if we can't trust them to organize themselves, pick their own leaders, and accomplish meaningful work. And making sure that they are independent is the best way of ensuring that they are productive. You know how the system works now -- every department has a citizen advisory committee, but all the members are appointed by someone at City Hall. Hardly independent. LA is primitive when it comes to encouraging meaningful citizen participation.

The power and influence of each NC revolves around its ability to truly represent the diverse interests of its neighborhood, reach consensus, and accomplish meaningful things. If they fail to do that, like if a particular interest group manages to get elected as officers, they'd lose credibility fast. There's no way that they could come to City Council and claim to represent the entire community when we know darned well they don't. We ain't stupid. And it would be hard for crazies to get elected because everyone who lives or works in the neighborhood could vote. And they could always be unelected by a frustrated neighborhood.

In some cases, the NCs could be contracted with by the city to provide certain services like crime prevention, so there would be a contractual obligation. And then there's the competitiveness with their adjacent neighborhoods.

The question is whether or not there's something dysfunctional about people in LA's neighborhoods that would cause us to fail while the system is successful in neighborhoods in St. Paul, Portland, Birmingham, Dayton, etc.