

To: JW
From: Greg
Re: Appointed Commission Meeting - Neighborhood Councils
Date: September 23, 1998

The appointed commission met tonight to revisit a few issues, including neighborhood councils. Absent were: Glickman, Edelman, Griego, Archie-Hudson, and Wilson.

Gaines and Nelson submitted separate written recommendations that suggested primarily that we begin with the 35 community planning districts with some adjustments. I gave you copies.

We originally thought this would be the way to begin, but we discovered the flaws and changed to a system whereby we begin organizing the neighborhoods and then cluster them into communities so they could share common offices, staff, equipment, and expenses. The funding equity, organizational, and communication problems created by the size differentials, and the Acarrot and stick@ problem of how we encourage the community leaders to organize their communities into neighborhood councils.

I spoke at the end of the entire discussion on NCS, but before any votes were taken. None of the NC groupies were there.

Henderson wanted to keep open the option for the City Council to appoint the NC leaders, and to use City Council districts as boundaries so we wouldn't destroy the work done by MRT. Kiefer agreed. (I didn't have a chance to explain to them that reapportionment would redraw new boundaries around and through the CD8 empowerment congress areas anyway.)

Tony Chavez submitted a letter from MALDEF explaining their opposition to the use of community planning districts. They noted the inequities created by size differences, and how the growth patterns of ethnic areas haven't stayed within the 30-year-old planning district areas. They felt there was a need to design neighborhood boundaries anew. He added that they found the proposal from Wachs for how to begin organizing the network Aappealing.@

Wilkinson urged that the boundary decision be left to ordinance. Mims said we could start with community planning districts, and then we could change them later by ordinance. Gaines felt by starting with planning districts we could spend 1-2 years doing outreach, and then think about ways to organize the neighborhoods. He was troubled by a bottom-up approach.

I told the commissioners about a conversation that I had earlier in the day with one of the super community leaders in Portland. She said she understood what we were going through, because all cities that have attempted to create an NC system have gone through the same thing. But she cautioned that we should try and confront our discomfort with a system that might not seem as orderly as we would like it to be at this point. The question is how much of that order should come from the charter commission today, and how much should be left to the neighborhoods later on. ADemocracy can be sloppy,@ she said.

Nelson asked me how many neighborhoods I thought we'd end up with --- 100? I said more likely in the 300's. She asked, "And each one would be funded?" I told her no, and briefly explained the clustering concept. She commented that she wasn't too concerned about the size differentials among planning districts because the areas with large numbers of people were also smaller in size and therefore had more of a sense of community.

The vote on this motion failed 3-10.

Nelson and Gaines had also suggested changing the name of the city agency that would support the NCs. After a brief discussion, somebody suggested "Office of Neighborhood Empowerment -- ONE." I kind of like the ONE acronym. "We are ONE." "We are Number ONE." "ONE City." It was pointed out that although the CAO had advised that creating this agency as a department would provide greater organizational flexibility for future city councils, recent proposals for the new charter would eliminate that difference.

This passed 8-5 with almost no discussion.

There was a unanimous vote for it to be established as an "Office."

Nelson and Calleia then made a motion to require that the NCs self-select their leaders. Currently their position is to leave this open to ordinance. When I spoke, I stressed that this was a critical fundamental issue that should be included in the Charter. I said that without it, it would too easy for a future city council to decide that they wanted to appoint all the NC leaders, and we'd have nothing resembling neighborhood empowerment. I suggested that it would be hard to sell this as a neighborhood empowerment package as long as this loophole was in the charter proposal. Before the meeting started I had asked one of the key staffers how she would sell their charter package as it appears now. What would give it its strongest appeal to the voters? She said the neighborhood councils portion. I was hoping that the commission understood this too.

Amazingly, with little discussion, the motion failed 5-8. Yes: Mims, Nelson, Calleia, Gaines, and De Sosa.

Earlier, at our suggestion, the commission voted to require that the boundaries be drawn in a way that followed neighborhood boundaries. They let this decision

They will probably not revisit this issue again, unless Kiefer puts it on an agenda, or it comes up in a conference committee discussion with the elected commission.

The next important day will be when the Weinberger task force meets on Oct. 1 at 6 p.m. at DWP. I expect that they will spend all their time discussing the various proposal for a decision-making system, but there's always the possibility that some parts of our plan will be revisited.

Kayser had indicated that he might make a motion for the general manager and commissioners to be selected in the same way the Ethics Commission does it. Also, Bennett had suggested that the Department of Neighborhoods also provide staff support to the new group of elected community council people. I asked him to give some thought to what this would mean exactly. I told him that I saw a problem in asking the department (or office) to provide support for the NCs with the intention of making them self-sufficient, and at the same time providing staff support to some of the very politicians they are being asked to watchdog. That would be, in Kayser=s plan, an additional 300-400 agendas that would have to be satisfied. It would be cleaner to just provide them with some direct staff like we do in council offices. I can put together a budget for a DON that would appear reasonable, but if we had to add Kayser=s part to it, who knows how big it would be.

Speaking of that, the elected commission staff said the mayor=s office needs to know what the budget estimates will be for these plans. I gave you the draft a budget for our plan. I thought we could avoid having to talk numbers by arguing that the DON will develop a specific plan after they are created.

In a somewhat related matter, the commission decided that it would be a good idea to decentralize the planning process, so they directed staff to do some more work on how to create some number of regional planning commissions.

Comments:

This commission left so much open to ordinance that they might as well have done nothing at all. Their boundary position makes it impossible for the Council to use Council districts, but they do have the ability to design a system in which they appoint all the leaders, and which creates so few offices that we=ll never been able to reach the grassroots. It=s harmful to give the City Council the direction to create a system that they could totally control.

Throughout all of this, I still am fascinated by the fact that the Mayor could implement all this tomorrow if he wanted. We wouldn=t have to wait for charter reform, or for council to enact an ordinance. He=s starting to put together next year=s budget, so all he=d have to do is budget for it.