

October 26, 1998

Elected Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission
Hand Delivered

Dear Commissioners:

I support the efforts of your commission to decentralize the city's decision-making system through the formal election of some number of new city officials who would have decision-making authority within their local areas. However, it is critically important that any such system exist in addition to, and not instead of, a system of participatory, grassroots neighborhood councils such as one recommended by your task force. Regardless of the number of formally-elected city officials, whether we have 15 city council members or 25 city council members and 280 community council members, the successful experiences in other cities have proven that maximum neighborhood empowerment can only be achieved through the addition of a citywide network of independent neighborhood councils that are empowered to choose their own leaders, define their own boundaries, determine their own agendas, and that are given the funds to maintain their own offices and hire their own staff.

These proposals have been product of a great deal of thought, hard work, and sincere attempts to provide greater empowerment to communities throughout the city. If your commission is unable to reach a consensus on any one of them, this should not be allowed to bring an end to this important and far-reaching public policy decision.

There is a way to both continue and expand this discussion.

Your commission should place into the new Charter measure:

1. The recommendation from your task force for a citywide network of participatory or grassroots neighborhood councils and a Department of Neighborhoods; and

2. A provision that after the network of neighborhood councils has begun, the city would create and support a special review commission comprised of one representative from each of the official neighborhood council clusters. Within a fixed period of time, perhaps a couple of years, the commission would have the opportunity to recommend whether they want (1) to change the structure of the citywide network into one that would

provide for their formal election, without or without decision-making authority, or (2) to create such a system separate, and in addition to, their own participatory/grassroots system.

This approach would allow deliberations on this landmark policy issue to continue throughout the city in an attempt to find consensus in the very places where we should be trying to find consensus -- in each of our neighborhoods. And the neighborhoods would be uniquely empowered to present their recommendations directly to the voters without the approval of the City Council.

Sincerely,

JOEL WACHS
President Pro Tem
Los Angeles City Council