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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

PRESENTATION BY

Mr. Lee Kanon Alpert, Esq., President, Los Angeles Board of Neighborhood Commissioners
Topic: The Development of Neighborhood Councils Within the City of Los Angeles
January 6, 2000

Chairman Abel in welcoming Mr. Alpert, remarked that Mr. Alpert's presentation is of importance both to the City and the region. As we think globally and act locally it becomes even more important.

Mr. Alpert in his opening comments thanked the Commission for the invitation. He commented that he was surprised at the invitation as his work, although within the County borders, is focused on the City of Los Angeles and is a result of the Charter Reform. Mr. Alpert continued that, as part of the Charter Reform Package, the Mayor had proposed and the people determined the need for Neighborhood Empowerment within City government.

There is a perception within the community that directives come from the top down with elected officials telling the people and the communities what they need. And yet there is not a true understanding of what each neighborhood needs, as opposed to each Council District. The Council Districts are composed of a quarter of a million people per Council District. The people and businesses within the communities decided that they wanted to have a voice in government and this is what the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment proposes to accomplish.

Mr. Alpert said that the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners is studying, evaluating and investigating other neighborhood councils, in other large cities across the country, that have been both successful and unsuccessful. These studies are for the purpose of guiding the Board in establishing Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils. The Board is now in the process of trying to help establish guidelines, for the various Neighborhood Councils that will be coming forward and asking to be recognized. They are attempting to determine what the Councils need in terms of size and numbers of people. He said that at this time no one knows exactly what the structure of a Neighborhood Council will be; it could change from neighborhood to neighborhood. The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, with the help of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, will submit a plan to the City Council within the allotted one-year time frame. After the submission of the plan to the City Council, the Council has six months to adopt a plan for Neighborhood Councils that will then go into effect.

Mr. Alpert remarked that the most frequent questions he hears deal with whether or not the concept of Neighborhood Councils will work. He does not yet know the answer to this question. He added that he thought that this effort could result in something successful.

The General Manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment has had tremendous successes working with the community and has a long history of community involvement. People will be hired to work within the community to develop interest amongst groups that do not always participate or feel that they have either been isolated or left out of the decision making process.

Mr. Alpert said that a good example of successful councils comes from the Recreation and Parks Commission. The Commission established Recreation and Park Councils in each of the recreation and parks facilities. These councils are made up of people from the senior community, the youth community, the business community, and others that have an interest. The councils were asked to advise the Parks and Recreation Commission on the actual needs of their respective parks, rather than the Department of Parks and Recreation arbitrarily establishing them. These councils are working.

Mr. Alpert commented that starting next month the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners will institute a series of community hearings, scheduled and publicized well in advance. The hearings, using facilitators, will enable communities to express their problems, needs, and requirements. These hearings will be in all areas of Los Angeles.

Chairman Abel interjected that he wished to share, both with Mr. Alpert and the Commission, that the Constitutional Revision Commission attended several presentations dealing with the Los Angeles City Charter Reform. The purpose was to learn from what the city was doing in relation to reorganization, economy, efficiency, and better service.

Commissioner Crowley asked Mr. Alpert if he would comment on the possibility of recommending the delegation of any political power to a neighborhood council. Mr. Alpert replied that although the issue had not been discussed, that the neighborhood councils were created to be advisory in nature. Commissioner Crowley wanted to know, assuming a small business district within a neighborhood has parking meters, who determines the length of time per quarter. Mr. Alpert answered that the determination would be made by a City department. If a Neighborhood Council has an opinion, they would study the problem and make a recommendation. The recommendation would then be submitted to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment who would contact the appropriate department to negotiate the issue.

Mr. Alpert continued that the empowerment within the communities is the establishment of the neighborhood councils and a department that would be responsive to a particular neighborhood. It has been requested that one or more people from each of the City departments be assigned to work with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. They would address the concerns of the neighborhood as expeditiously as possible.

Chairman Abel commented that this is an experiment worth watching. He continued saying that there are a lot of inconsistencies in the charter and in the Los Angeles Board of Neighborhood Commissioners mandate. He added that the Commission would learn by monitoring the ongoing progress of these efforts.

Vice Chair Lucente interjected that the reason he supported the Charter Reform and the formation of Neighborhood Councils was that he felt that they would bring empowerment and organization to areas where there was none.

Mr. Alpert said that the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners couldn't fault any of the issues or concerns that have been brought to its attention, as they are the same issues and concerns of the Board as well. He said that the Board was aware of the concerns within groups that one faction was apprehensive of what another might do. He confided that much of the dialogue he had heard was positively directed. This dialogue means that there is a concern from each of these groups and organizations over the things to be accomplished. The question is what kind of impact are these efforts going to have? He appreciated the concerns and suggestions that the Economy & Efficiency Commission has expressed and encouraged future dialogue.

Mr. Alpert, in summarizing, said the concern of the Board was not in getting people involved in the Neighborhood Councils or forming the councils, but rather on what will get done. The concern is also on

how to get the various departments, the general managers, and the bureaucrats to respond to the service needs of the various neighborhoods and the neighborhood councils. This will be the critical determination that will make or break the neighborhood councils.

Chairman Abel thanked Mr. Alpert saying that the work that was being undertaken by the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners has the potential for major impact on how the City, and in some important respects, how the County will be structured in the future. He asked Mr. Alpert to keep the Commission informed as to the progress of the Board.

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Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, Room 163, 500 West Temple St.,
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone (213) 974-1491 FAX (213) 620-1437 [EMail eecomm@co.la.ca.us](mailto:EEComm@co.la.ca.us)
WEB eec.co.la.ca.us