

Neighborhood Council System Reforms

This past year, the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council System turned fifteen years old. This one-of-a-kind civic experiment has fostered grassroots activism, civic innovation, and provided a stronger voice to communities that otherwise would have less influence at City Hall.

Fifteen years of evolution has also uncovered areas where the system can be improved. Some of these improvements are fundamental, stemming from the charter section that empowers Neighborhood Councils, and others are simpler matters of policy change that can be implemented by city departments or by ordinance.

In July of 2017, I assumed chairpersonship of the City Council Committee that oversees the Neighborhood Council System, the Health, Education and Neighborhood Councils Committee. Having previously served on a Neighborhood Council, I have a strong interest in ensuring their continued viability.

To determine what changes may be needed in the system going forwards, I embarked on a listening tour to many of the Neighborhood Council Alliances. Additionally, my office sent a survey to all Neighborhood Council listservs soliciting feedback from Neighborhood Council members and the interested public. Over 160 Neighborhood Council stakeholders responded. Reviewing these submissions, evaluating the information presented in the committee hearings I have held over the past nine months on pending Neighborhood Council policy matters, and meeting with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and the City Clerk, I have developed a list of policy ideas for the Neighborhood Council System that should be reviewed.

As these ideas will need substantial input from Neighborhood Council members and stakeholders before determining which should move forward. To ensure enough time is provided to develop that input, this motion will not be heard in committee until at least 90 days after it is introduced in order to provide Neighborhood Councils time to deliberate on the proposals and submit Community Impact Statements.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment be INSTRUCTED, with assistance as needed from the CLA, CAO, City Clerk and City Attorney, to report back within 60 days on the following:

- Recommendations and next steps for amending City Charter Article IX to change the name of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE) to the Neighborhood Councils Department (NCD), the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (BONC) to the Neighborhood Councils Commission (NCC), and phasing out the use of the term/branding 'EmpowerLA' due to the confusion reported by the public and the perception of Neighborhood Council members that DONE's role should be primarily to support Neighborhood Councils, which the name Neighborhood Councils Department would better reflect.
- Recommendations and next steps for amending the Los Angeles Administrative Code to remove the "Community Impact Stakeholder," which has caused substantial confusion and disputed elections, and recommendations and next steps for including specific additional definitions by ordinance of eligible voters and board members of Neighborhood Councils, such as student or parent/guardian of a student.
- Recommendations and next steps for amending City Charter Article IX Section 901.d and 904.f to remove any reference to "selections" and clarify that Neighborhood Council board members will be elected. Neighborhood Council "selection" processes are utilized by a limited and decreasing number of councils and are not viewed by the public as being as democratic as elections as they do not provide for a secret ballot or equitable participation.
- Recommendations and next steps for creating a one-time review process, overseen by the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, to evaluate Neighborhood Council bylaws to determine if board seats

are equitably allocated amongst stakeholder types and provide formal suggestions to Neighborhood Councils on ways to adjust board seats as needed to increase equity.

- Recommendations and next steps for adopting regulations to provide a uniform minimum voting age and board member age to allow consistent participation across the City, and what that age should be.
- Recommendations and next steps for developing and adopting a planning and land use training required for all Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Neighborhood Council planning and land use committees.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Clerk be INSTRUCTED, with assistance as needed from the CLA, CAO, DONE and City Attorney, to report back within 60 days on the following:

- Recommendations and next steps on a process for Neighborhood Councils to be able to roll-over a non-cumulative maximum of \$10,000 in any given fiscal year.
- Recommendations and next steps for removing Section 5.485.h of Chapter 88 of Division 5 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code (Ordinance 179545; see Council File 03-1260), and recommendations for other amendments to that Chapter, in order to remove the expiration of the ability for Neighborhood Councils to accept in-kind or monetary donations.
- On the costs and other implications of holding all Neighborhood Council elections on the same day in order to provide for a uniform citywide advertising and outreach campaign.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, and all relevant departments denoted below, be INSTRUCTED to:


- Develop a process, with the assistance of GSD and the City Clerk, to assist Neighborhood Councils with accessing shared space in City facilities, as envisioned in Council File 16-0298.
- Develop an ongoing compendium of best practices generated from Neighborhood Councils and share those on a periodic basis with all Neighborhood Councils and include 'how-to guides' for accomplishing those best practices.
- Develop point of contact lists for key city departments and agencies, including DCP, DOT, Public Works' Bureaus, Aging, Disability, HCID, DCA, LADWP, Port, Airport, Cannabis Regulation, Emergency Management, Animal Services, LAPD, LAFD, Recreation and Parks, Zoo, Finance, Library, Economic and Workforce Development and BIDs, with assistance from those listed departments and agencies, and share those lists with Neighborhood Councils, facilitate the training of those points of contact at those relevant departments on the most fruitful ways to assist and communicate with Neighborhood Council members, and coordinate with Neighborhood Councils to formally appoint a point of contact at each NC to communicate between each NC and the point of contact at each department, thus creating a single line of communication.

I FURTHER MOVE that Neighborhood Councils and Neighborhood Council Alliances be REQUESTED to provide feedback and/or Community Impact Statements (CISs) to the Health, Education, and Neighborhood Councils Committee within 90 days.

ORIGINAL

MAY 25 2018

PRESENTED BY:


DAVID E. RYU
Councilmember, 4th District

SECONDED BY:

