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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

**PRESENTATION OF
Edward Dilkes, Executive Director
Los Angeles City Elected Charter Commission
October 1, 1997**

Topic: Commission Work Plan

Chairman Abel introduced Mr. Dilkes and asked him to give an overview of the Commission's work plan. Mr. Dilkes stated that he would give as much of an update as possible, but the majority of his time has been spent setting up the office. This has been an incredibly slow process of securing space, funding, and necessary office supplies. For example, the approval process to accept donated office space took nearly two months. For other office necessities, like computers, Mr. Dilkes has been told that he could have 5, used 486s in four to six weeks. Given the fact that the LACECC has a two year window in which to operate, this slow set up process has been extremely frustrating.

Like the Economy and Efficiency Commission, the LACECC is interested in accountability. The current charter makes accountability impossible. Mr. Dilkes' personal view of the mission of both charter commissions is to structure a charter that permits and encourages accountability within the organization of the city.

The current charter is littered with outdated supporting information that will be easy to remove. The rest of the charter is very similar to other special interest legislation. An example is the franchise section which dates back to the 1920's railroad expansion. When cable franchising began, a two page section dedicated to this specific topic was inserted into the charter. All that is needed in the charter is one paragraph provision, with minor parameters, which decision makers will then enforce.

Section 5 of the charter gives criteria for hiring city employees: residency, sex, health, habits, moral character, marital status and qualifications. This provision is, of course, ignored, but it needs to be completely removed.

The utility issues from 1888 are still included in the charter. This is under a section called Litigation Dealing with Utility Companies Now Resolved. This information is also no longer relevant and needs to be removed from the charter.

Removal of unnecessary topics from the charter will be relatively easy. What will be difficult is to formulate a strategy for "power trading" between the mayor, the bureaucracy, and the city council. These three entities continually overlap, but there is never an organization or person that is ever finally responsible for anything. This means no one is rewarded for doing a good job and no one is disciplined for doing a bad job. This culture permeates all facets of the city government. Terms of office for managerial personnel, a situation unique to the City of Los Angeles, also contributes to lack of accountability. A charter cannot change this situation overnight. It will set up the framework in which changes can be encouraged and implemented.

On June 6, 1999 the LACECC ceases operation. It is unclear whether its ballot measure has to occur before or after this date, therefore both charter commissions are planning to have completed charters in April 1999 in order to get on the ballot by June 6, 1999.

Both the LACECC and the appointed charter reform commission, headed by Executive Director, Raphael Sonnenshine, are committed to working together to coordinate reform efforts. The appointed charter commission produced a booklet, Road to Decision, which LACECC is using as a guide. By January, the LACECC should be up to speed and ready to begin the process of interviews, etc. The Commissioners are all eager to begin work.

Mr. Dilkes asked what projects the EEC has been working on that might be of benefit to the LACECC. Chairman Abel stated that the EEC put out a report following up on the work of the California Constitution Revision Commission which examined the relationship between state and local government. He added that the Commission is interested in how finance affects local government, overlapping jurisdictions, etc., but he did not believe this was an area the LACECC would cover. Mr. Dilkes stated that the charter does dictate the way the city spends certain funds, therefore discretionary funding is limited. This is an area the LACECC plans to examine. Mr. Dilkes stated that the charter can create a requirement that assures that money gets spent efficiently.

Mr. Dilkes stated that there were two ways to measure efficiency for governments:

1. Customer Service Requirements - completion of job, time line, and quality. This is the measure of outputs only.
2. Financially. Financial concerns must be placed 2nd, due to the necessity that governmental decisions are made based on a combination of humanitarian and non-market wage determinations.

The Department of Sanitation has demonstrated the successful combination of the above requirements in refuse collection, which has resulted in better collection times, customer satisfaction, and broader menu of services. The customer service requirements took priority, however, the cost of these services did not have to decrease to make this a successful project. Mr. Dilkes stated that the charter should require management systems that insure constant improvements in service delivery. The cost of these services is secondary and often outside of the authority of the charter.

Chairman Abel asked Mr. Dilkes to tell the Commission about his background. Mr. Dilkes gave a brief biography on himself.

Commissioner Fuhrman asked if the city charter should be similar to the U.S. Constitution which outlines only broad powers, but does not get into specifics. Mr. Dilkes stated that a city charter differs from the Constitution because it is a document for an entity that handles needs, such as: garbage removal, sewage, protection of citizens, water, electricity, etc. This is a very "nuts and bolts" service rather than establishing broad policies. There needs to be some specifics in the charter to insure accountability.

Mr. Dilkes stated that the charter commissions are charged with devising a new political contract that will hold the city together.

Commissioner Buerk asked how the two charter commissions plan to work together. He added that there are several cities that do not have a high level of detail in their charter, whose city council and mayor are responsible for services - why is this not possible in Los Angeles? Mr. Dilkes replied that most cities in California are general law cities, that have no charter, they have 5 council members and a mayor is selected from that number. The general law cities have governed very effectively. He doesn't believe this system could work in Los Angeles, because there is less of a combination of services in the city, as opposed to the County. He stated that the two commissions want to produce one product. The problem is that the appointed commission must submit their charter to the council who can amend the document. The elected Commission's document is submitted to the council and then placed directly on the ballot.

Chairman Abel asked Commissioner Ojeda-Kimbrough to tell the Commission about her new position. Commissioner Ojeda-Kimbrough stated that she is now a Deputy for Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg.

Commissioner Petak asked if the new charter will be ignored, as is the case with the current charter, and how can the charter change the culture of an organization? Mr. Dilkes replied that the charter cannot change the culture but it can set up a structure for change. He added that a document called Banning Bureaucracy addresses the change in culture. He stated that the governmental culture in Los Angeles will soon be driven primarily by financial issues. For example, the DWP is dealing with debt and deregulation.

Chairman Abel thanked Mr. Dilkes for his presentation and asked him to stay for a report that is relevant to the topics he discussed.

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