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## Locals get say in use of land

### Neighborhood councils gain

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Since development is one of the most contentious and pressing issues in the city, the Los Angeles Planning Department and neighborhood councils have launched a pilot program to give communities a greater say in land-use decisions.

Under the agreement, the Planning Department will send neighborhood councils copies of project applications and ensure that any position the councils take is considered in final decisions.

Sounds simple enough. But it's a level of communication that residents and activists have rarely been able to achieve with the massive, complicated department.

As a result, residents, planners and developers have often battled over new commercial and residential projects.

Some neighborhood councils members said they hope more information and insight will lead to more consensus and better development.

"With education, (neighborhood councils) will be willing to allow more development when they've had an educated look at the project and had discussion with the applicant to reach agreement and find a middle ground," said Jacque Lamishaw, a Winnetka Neighborhood Council member and planning consultant who helped develop the pilot program.

Planning Director Gail Goldberg, who took over the department a year ago today, has said neighborhood councils should have a role in designing and developing its communities.

The pilot program is part of her effort to engage the community in planning its neighborhoods.

"We're trying to come up with real plans communities can embrace," Goldberg said. "If we're going to create plans together, we need to have a relationship."

Besides getting neighborhood councils more information about projects, the department will offer training in how to read technical planning documents, how to make effective comments on proposals, and other planning topics.

The pilot program is the second agreement neighborhood councils have finalized with city departments. Under a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Water and Power, councils now are notified and consulted before important decisions and proposed rate increases.

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