

Los Angeles Daily News

West Hills council votes not to disband

City response may have saved panel

By James Nash
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Thursday, January 09, 2004 - WEST HILLS -- The West Hills Neighborhood Council lives on.

Capping weeks of debate over whether to quit over bureaucratic red tape from the city of Los Angeles, members said Thursday they decided not to dissolve their advisory panel because officials have responded to some of their complaints. The council made the decision Wednesday night.

Had members decided to disband, West Hills would have been the first of nearly 100 neighborhood councils in Los Angeles to vote itself out of existence. The group's threats to disband -- motivated by difficulty in securing an office and \$50,000 in city funds -- alarmed city officials including Councilman Dennis Zine, who made an aborted attempt to run for the panel.

"We felt that we have made substantial progress in moving it forward," said Neighborhood Council president Stephen Lenske, adding the council got an office at the Boeing complex on Fallbrook Avenue but still is experiencing delays in receiving city funds.

Board member Ed Youngblood said city officials were slow to respond to members' concerns until the group's former president, Charles Gremer, resigned in frustration last August and the group considered disbanding a month later.

"We've made a lot of progress with (the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment) since it became a public issue," he said.

Zine was pleased that the group won't disband, saying, "We have growing pains with neighborhood councils, and we're going to have to respond to those as they come up." West Hills' frustrations were mirrored in the hillside neighborhoods of Bel-Air, whose neighborhood council president also resigned over a lack of support from the city. Stephen Lukasik, who headed the Bel-Air-Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council until last August, told a Los Angeles City Council committee that the job left him exhausted because of a lack of support from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

DONE General Manager Greg Nelson said the department is working with the Bel-Air-Beverly Glen organizers on getting an office. Unlike leaders in West Hills, those in Bel-Air-Beverly Glen have not publicly talked about disbanding the neighborhood council. James Nash, (213) 978-0390 james.nash@dailynews.com