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Neighborhood councils unbound

City attorney helps panels find their autonomy

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When the Valley Glen Neighborhood Council holds its election later this month, it will mark a historic day for community empowerment in Los Angeles: the first free election.

The city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment has been doing just the opposite of what its name says by setting arbitrary rules for elections to keep local communities as powerless as they always have been in Los Angeles.

But thanks to City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo and the spirited efforts of Valley Glen community organizers, at least one pillar of City Hall's repression of neighborhoods has been toppled.

Valley Glen activists wrangled for months with DONE over department head Greg Nelson's restrictive and arbitrary rules. But Delgadillo's office ruled that Nelson was violating the City Charter reform that created the councils, and the commission overseeing DONE agreed.

Valley Glen now is in the process of holding its election on its own terms -- as the City Charter said.

This was a small victory, but an important one in the fight to wrest some power away from City Hall and empower the public. It's now time that the City Council hold hearings on the widespread dissatisfaction with DONE, and begin to give power to the people, where it belongs.