

Residents make changes to proposed Neighborhood Council

By Kevin Butler

In a four-and-a-half hour session, residents in the Hollywood United Neighborhood Council area last Thursday reviewed, amended and approved the organization's bylaws, taking the proposed group one step closer to certification by the city.

More than 200 residents gathered at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood to discuss and debate the bylaws before making key changes in the document's proposed stakeholder definition, board representation, term limits and nomination procedures.

In a somewhat heated and hectic process, participants went through the bylaws section by section, making amendments and clarifying confusion in the document before wrapping up just seconds before the city's time deadline.

"We presented the bylaws to the community, and we are going to continue to work to unify the community," said Russell Brown, the council's co-chair, after the process ended.

Residents first debated and voted down the document's definition of voting stakeholders. Originally, the definition included not just those who work, live or own property in the area, but also those who participate in neighborhood organizations like nonprofit groups, church groups and educational institutions.

Some residents said the definition was too broad and could lead the council to be packed with "carpetbaggers" who didn't fully share the neighborhood's interests.

"I think we keep it simple," John Balasz said.

Balasz said a broader definition would be confusing and potentially give outsiders too much influence.

The council's bylaws committee must revamp the definition of "stakeholder" in accordance with the residents' verdict before it takes the bylaws to the city for approval.

The most controversial and time-consuming debate occurred over the composition of the council's 17-member board. Residents debated the wisdom of the document's proposal for nine at-large seats and the influence of renters in the council.

Residents voted to reserve two at-large seats each for homeowners and renters and to reduce the number of at-large seats to two, while keeping one at-large seat each for education, nonprofit and faith-based groups.

The change to the number of renters' seats came after several apartment dwellers said that the bylaws would let homeowners dominate the board.

Residents kept the bylaws' system of five district board seats despite some objecting that it would cause ugly divisions in the community. HUNC leaders created the districts in

part to ensure that residents south of Franklin Avenue, who they say have had low community involvement, are represented in the council.

"I don't agree with the division because I feel that we already have homeowners' associations in that area" to deal with localized problems, Tina Roman said.

But others felt that too many at-large seats would reduce board members' accountability.

"I think it's critical that we have geographic representation," Susan Stephenson said. "If everyone is responsible, then no one is responsible."

Residents largely agreed that the document's eight-year term limits were too long and voted to cut them to four years.

The nomination process was also the focus of debate at the session. Residents feared that the bylaws' proposed nomination committee, composed of at least three members selecting nominees for the board of directors, would allow an insular group to retain power in the council.

"I think a small nomination committee that presents a pre-supported slate of candidates is a bad thing," Eric Bruskin said after residents voted to eliminate the committee.

The council's boundaries extend roughly westward from Western Avenue and Fern Dell to Cahuenga Boulevard at Hollywood Boulevard and the Hollywood Freeway, and northward from Hollywood Boulevard to the Hollywood Sign.

The HUNC was formed through a merger of the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin-Hollywood Hills Community Council after the two groups claimed identical boundaries when applying to the city for certification.

The city ordered them to come to an agreement and reapply.

The meeting was interrupted by protests from a faction of the Franklin-Hollywood Hills Council that is now actively opposing the merger.

"They lied about the basis of the merger," George Abrahams said. "There was no merger."

Members of the faction called the process illegitimate and some refrained from voting.

They also presented a letter from an attorney calling the claimed merger a "miscarriage of justice and a fraud upon the public."

Andrew Glazier, co-chair of HUNC, said the group was united behind the merger.

"I think if you look at who's involved, there's always going to be fringe elements that when they don't get their way, they want to take their ball and jacks and go home," he said.

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