

DONE Board unlikely to certify council for Hollywood

By Leigh Bailey, Hollywood Independent, 2-26-02

In a move that may set the formation of a recognized Hollywood Neighborhood Council back indefinitely, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment recommended last week that none of the three competing Neighborhood Councils be awarded certification.

Last night, the DONE Board of Commissioners held a hearing at Selma Elementary School in Hollywood to determine the future of the councils in the Hollywood area. Results from that hearing were not available as of presstime.

Although representatives from each proposed council were scheduled to testify in favor of certification for their group, members of the DONE staff said they did not expect the board to recommend certification for any of the organizations, based on the department's findings.

The DONE recommendations come at the tail end of several months of unsuccessful and often rancorous mediation between two of the competing councils, the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin/Hollywood Hills Neighborhood Council. Both organizations applied for certification last fall, but both proposals claimed to represent virtually the same geographic area.

More recently, the Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood Council submitted boundaries that overlap areas already claimed by both the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin Hills groups.

According to documents filed with DONE, the Hollywood Alliance's proposed boundaries cover the area between Mulholland Drive, Normandie Avenue, Hollywood Boulevard, Highland Avenue, Hollywood Boulevard, Beachwood Canyon and the Yucca Corridor section of Hollywood

The Franklin/Hollywood Hills proposed boundaries cover much of the same area: It proposed an area that stretches from the Hollywood Sign, Mulholland Drive, Ferndell Drive, Western Avenue, Hollywood Boulevard, Ivar Avenue, the Hollywood Freeway, the Franklin Hills, Beachwood Canyon and Hollywoodland.

In cases where boundaries are in dispute, DONE's procedure has been to deny certification until the parties involved can come to a resolution. If no private resolution is possible, DONE requires the parties to go into mediation with a representative of the City Attorney's Office.

Mediation between organizers of two of the councils was recommended late last year, when it became apparent to department representatives working with the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin Hills group that they could not come to an agreement.

"It's my understanding that the negotiations were fairly contentious," said Claudia Dunn, assistant general manager of the department.

They also failed. "No resolution was achieved," Dunn said.

As a result, the department recommended that the DONE board not grant certification to any of the competing organizations.

According to Greg Nelson, DONE general manager, the issues between the competing councils

are largely a matter of long-standing personal acrimony that has existed between the organizers of the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin Hills group.

Nelson said his office "worked very hard with these groups" to try to bring about some kind of resolution, but his staff was unable to overcome the "personality conflicts" that have plagued negotiations almost since the beginning of the process.

Those personality conflicts may ultimately be the deciding factor in which, if either, group is certified.

"If one party gets up there and their testimony is full of rancor and personal attacks, and the other party takes the high road, that might be enough to have the board decide in their favor," Nelson said.

But he said his department could not recommend the certification of what he called "a dysfunctional body."

"If the Neighborhood Council [in Hollywood] is dysfunctional, what council office is going to listen to them?" Nelson asked.

He said he has tried, unsuccessfully, to impress upon leaders from both groups that "certification does not equal legitimacy."

"People tend to forget that certification is only part of the process," Nelson explained. "What follows certification is free and fair and open elections of the [Neighborhood Council board]."

Effectively, what that means is that all of the personalities currently involved could be voted out of office and an entire new group ushered in to run things.

"We're working inside a meritocracy," Nelson said. "Whoever is certified, and whoever is elected, will have to earn their credibility."

One of the most hotly disputed areas is a low-income, largely Latino neighborhood known as the Yucca Corridor.

Both the Hollywood Alliance and the Franklin Hills Association claim that they represent the residents of the Yucca Corridor, with whom neither group has very much in common, at least on the surface.

Nelson said some of his staff have speculated that the two councils' motives for wanting to include the area are very divergent.

"It's been suggested that one of the councils wants to include [Yucca Corridor] for reasons of access, so that they can expand their boundaries down into the Hollywood Business Improvement District," an area which represents a good deal of the commercial interests in Hollywood, he said.

The other council, Nelson said, "really believes in the spirit of inclusiveness, and says they want to include the Yucca Corridor group for reasons of diversity."

Nelson wouldn't indicate which council he believes has which motives.

He said his office has recommended that the Yucca Corridor coalition stay out of the fray for now, and that they "wait to see what happens" before deciding which group to align themselves with.

Although Nelson declined to hazard a guess as to which way the DONE board would vote, he did say he didn't expect that the two groups would be melded to create one unified council.

"Basically, our recommendations to the board was that the combination of these two groups was a recipe for dysfunction," he said.

"For legal reasons, we haven't been able to share some of the long-standing personality conflicts" that have existed between the two organizations in the DONE report, Nelson explained, but he said he was counting on last night's testimony to make apparent in the flesh what could only be suggested in writing.

"One of two things is going to happen," he said. Either each side's testimony "will reflect the kind of grassroots cooperation that Neighborhood Councils are supposed to be about, or it could turn into an audition for 'The Jerry Springer Show.'"

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