

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Northridge advisory panel took election to the dogs

By James Nash

Staff Writer

**Wednesday, December 10, 2003** - NORTHRIDGE -- Los Angeles officials confirmed Wednesday they are investigating an election of a local advisory panel in which dogs -- but not cats -- were allowed to vote.

The election Sunday of the Old Northridge Neighborhood Council, one of about 100 advisory panels in Los Angeles, was tainted by a lack of notice to potential voters and by a ballot in which voters had no choice but to elect a slate of 12 candidates, say people challenging the election.

Northridge resident Sherry Johnston filed a formal challenge Wednesday to the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. Greg Nelson, general manager of the department that oversees neighborhood councils, said he would launch a formal inquiry today.

Johnston was not available for comment.

But in her challenge letter, she noted that there was no provision for write-in candidates and that everyone, even dogs, was entitled to vote.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment had urged organizers of the Old Northridge Neighborhood Council to postpone the election. Unlike most neighborhood councils, Old Northridge organizers conducted the election without the assistance of DONE or an independent monitor.

In a Dec. 5 letter, a DONE project coordinator asked the Old Northridge organizers to delay the election to bring in a neutral third party to oversee balloting.

More than 500 people voted Sunday during Art Block, a raucous annual art show, punk rock concert and neighborhood party. Organizers of the Old Northridge Neighborhood Council, which represents about 17,000 people near the California State campus, say the group encourages young people to participate by maintaining a lighthearted, countercultural atmosphere.

The neighborhood council calls itself the Gilgamesh, and members call themselves kapuna, both terms rooted in mythology.

Don L. Larson, founder of the Old Northridge Neighborhood Council, said the group followed normal election procedures except for allowing dogs to vote. He said three dogs voted but cats were not allowed "because they're not trustworthy." Everyone who ran for a seat won, he said.

"We're very committed to the street, and this is a very street-level piece of community networking, real neighborhood business," Larson said. "We would have been glad to take anyone in the community -- nearly anyone in the community -- who appreciates what a kapuna is."

As a city-recognized neighborhood council under a 1999 charter amendment, the Old Northridge group qualifies for \$50,000 in city funds and can take advisory votes on issues affecting residents, businesses and visitors in its boundaries.

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