

Daily News

City Clerk's office will decide Van Nuys races

By James Nash

Staff Writer

May 29, 2003

VAN NUYS -- The Van Nuys Neighborhood Council voted Wednesday to give the Los Angeles City Clerk's office authority to resolve challenges to the election of nine of its 15 members.

The advisory panel's 7-4 decision heartened some Van Nuys activists who said a four-month standoff over the neighborhood council election has embarrassed the community.

"I will trust the judgment of the democratically elected board," said Enrique Aragon, an activist who supported many of the winning candidates.

Board members said they hope the City Clerk's office will resolve the challenges quickly and fairly to begin healing divisions since the panel's February election

"I hope we can move forward and be in unity and harmony with regard to our city," said George Hernandez, who was elected to a position representing nonprofit groups.

The City Clerk's office is willing to take up the challenges, executive officer Frank Martinez said earlier Wednesday. But before the office gets involved, it would likely seek approval from the Los Angeles City Council, Martinez said.

Wednesday's meeting marked the third attempt by the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council to resolve challenges against nine of its 15 members. Shortly after the Feb. 8 election for seats on the advisory panel five activists and losing candidates filed challenges alleging that the vote was tainted by illegal electioneering.

Since then, the neighborhood council has voted to forward the challenges to two City Council members, the City Attorney's office, the League of Women Voters and Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County. All except the League of Women Voters declined to hear the challenges. The league recommended a new election, but the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, which oversees neighborhood councils, rejected the recommendation.