

Los Angeles Daily News

City rejects local council for Northridge

Directors vow court battle

By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer

Tuesday, July 22, 2003 -

The long-simmering clash over the Northridge Advisory Neighborhood Council boiled over on Tuesday when the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to reject its request for certification, setting the stage for a court battle.

With angry exchanges among residents, spilling over to include new Councilman Greig Smith, members of the group's directors said they will take the city to court to force their recognition after the 13-0 vote to reject their appeal.

"I have said all along this would be a battle fought on different levels," said Jane Lowenthal, president of the group. "We lost the battle here at City Hall, and now we will go to court."

DONE general manager Greg Nelson, whose agency has certified all 74 other advisory councils, defended his agency's decision.

"It's unfortunate it had to come to this," Nelson said. "We had tried to work with them but couldn't reach any agreement."

Northridge organizers said they believe they were singled out because they have criticized city officials for the slow police response time in the Northwest Valley and for the continued disrepair of the Northridge municipal swimming pool. After the vote, Smith was upbraided by resident Pamela Van Cortlandt, who complained the new councilman was not representing the community.

"You don't live in Northridge, you don't know what's going on there," Van Cortlandt said. "All you want to do is represent big developers and Cal State Northridge at the expense of homeowners."

Smith said he had concerns the council wasn't representative of the whole community.

"There are 10 other neighborhood councils in my district, and this is the only one where there have been these kind of problems," Smith said.

Bill Christopher, chairman of the Neighborhood Empowerment Commission, said he found the Northridge situation unique.

"This was the only neighborhood council that I've seen that didn't bring any supporters to its certification meeting," Christopher said. "And opponents came to speak out against it. It's just very rare to have that situation."

Several residents complained about how the group ran its meetings and the hostility that was present.

"I have been yelled at and received threats," Northridge resident Steve Slutzah said.

"They hold these marathon meetings but don't let people talk about the issues. They've had poor outreach to anyone who has a different view. I think what they need there is anger management classes."

Added Jim Alger, another resident: "Neighborhood councils were intended to empower neighborhoods and not to operate as a platform to push forward personal agendas under the guise of speaking on behalf of a community."

But Lowenthal and others in support said their problem was in trying to develop a neighborhood council to suit the needs of residents that might be at variance with the DONE regulations.

"What we heard from the department is that 'you people' weren't the right ones for the neighborhood," Lowenthal said. "I find that offensive."

Charles Brink, another board member, said the purpose of the neighborhood councils was to provide an independent voice for the community, but this group was being forced to abide by DONE requirements as opposed to what residents wanted to see in effect.

"What you gave the neighborhoods as independence is far different from what DONE now demands as total control of the neighborhood councils and their election procedures," Brink said.

Staff Writer James Nash contributed to this report.

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