

# West Hills council threatens to quit

By James Nash  
Staff Writer, Daily News  
Friday, August 22, 2003

WEST HILLS -- Frustrated by bureaucratic roadblocks to their effort to get an office and city funding, members of the West Hills Neighborhood Council are considering the unprecedented step of dissolving their advisory body.

The West Hills Neighborhood Council was the first of 26 panels in the San Fernando Valley certified under a 1999 charter-reform measure to bring more power to Los Angeles communities. If West Hills Neighborhood Council members vote to disband at their meeting Sept. 3, it would be the first of about 100 neighborhood councils citywide to vote itself out of existence.

Members said they are fed up with two years of delays by city officials in securing them an office. They said they've also been frustrated in their attempt to tap into \$50,000 of promised city funding and over their inability to rent even a post office box.

"It's a long time to be listening to the promises of what it can and should be versus what it really is," said neighborhood council board member Ed Youngblood.

Los Angeles Councilman Dennis Zine, who represents much of West Hills, expressed sympathy for the members' concerns but said disbanding would deprive the community of representation in the citywide network of neighborhood councils -- and of its \$50,000 cut of city funds.

"There's great frustration with neighborhood councils throughout the city, and I share that frustration," Zine said. "It's been a very trying, difficult, frustrating red-tape experience for people in the community who give their time to set up a neighborhood council operation."

Neighborhood council members are not paid. And those in West Hills said they've sacrificed not only their time but, because they have no office, they have to give up space in their homes and workplaces for neighborhood council functions.

"You can't conduct city business this way," said Stephen Lenske, interim president of the West Hills Neighborhood Council. "This is a problem that should have been resolved two years ago when it was brought to the city's attention."

Lenske has headed the West Hills group since the Aug. 15 resignation of Charles Gremer, who helped establish the panel in 2001. Gremer said he stepped down for many of the same reasons the remaining neighborhood council leaders have cited in deciding whether to dissolve the panel.

"I do not want West Hills left up in the air," Gremer said. "I really am disappointed in the actions of the city."

Greg Nelson, general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, which oversees neighborhood councils, said his staff has already offered the West Hills group temporary quarters in city buildings in Reseda and Panorama City. Lenske, however, said the offices should be in or near West Hills.

Nelson said few neighborhood councils have their own offices but that the city's Department of General Services has been working to identify buildings that could house the advisory panels.

"For the ones who want office space, they're either understanding of our attempt to streamline the process or willing to accept our offer of temporary space," Nelson said. "Is that enough for me? No. All we can do is give it the absolute best that we can."

Although the board of the West Hills Neighborhood Council could resign en masse, it could not eliminate the neighborhood council without approval from the city's Board of Neighborhood Commissioners or the City Council, Nelson said.

No neighborhood council has attempted to eliminate itself, he said.