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Council votes to stay rather than disband

By James Nash

Staff Writer

Thursday, September 04, 2003 - WEST HILLS -- Members of the West Hills Neighborhood Council decided Wednesday night to try to untangle bureaucratic red tape involved in getting an office and city funds rather than dissolve the advisory panel.

The West Hills Neighborhood Council, the first of 26 neighborhood councils in the San Fernando Valley and about 100 in Los Angeles, has been stymied by roadblocks in securing a permanent office and tapping into \$50,000 in city funding.

Members of the panel said it can't perform its role representing West Hills to Los Angeles City Hall without an office in or near West Hills and without money to rent a post office box and buy office supplies and other equipment.

Their frustrations boiled over into a movement to dissolve the neighborhood council. But at a meeting Wednesday night, council members voted unanimously to postpone any decision on the council's future until after its November election for officers.

"Nobody wants to dissolve this thing," Ed Youngblood, a member of the council board, said Thursday. "Everyone wants to see it work. It will require a little more proactive commitment on our part as well, to push (city officials) toward coming to more creative solutions."

Last week, Greg Nelson, the head of the city department that oversees neighborhood councils, proposed new guidelines that would allow neighborhood councils to lease space in private office buildings or city facilities. Nelson said the

new rules would allow neighborhood councils to get offices in a matter of weeks instead of months -- a key complaint of the West Hills Neighborhood Council leaders.

Los Angeles Councilman Greig Smith, who represents northern West Hills, said none of the roadblocks identified by neighborhood council leaders should stand in the way for long.

"Whether they're issues of city bureaucracy or just a lack of understanding by someone -- whether they're city staff or neighborhood council staff -- I think they're fairly easily resolvable," Smith said. James Nash, (818) 713-3722
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