

Los Angeles Daily News

City Council meets in Van Nuys

By Rick Orlov
Staff Writer

Wednesday, September 24, 2003 - VAN NUYS -- For the first time with all its new members, the Los Angeles City Council left City Hall to open its meetings to the public. With more than 300 people gathered in the open courtyard of the Marvin Braude San Fernando Valley Constituent Service Center, the council promised to step up its efforts to meet more often away from City Hall.

"It's important for us, as a council, to get out in the community to let people know we are available," said Councilman Tony Cardenas, whose district includes the Van Nuys Civic Center area. "We want people to know they can approach us and bring their concerns to us."

As the council met, members of the Van Nuys Neighborhood Council set up a table to let people know of their problems with the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and difficulties in getting their advisory panel started after a disputed election. Its first post-election meeting is to be held today.

"We had to wait 61 days to get started," complained Victoria Davis Castillo, one of the board members. "It seemed like the department just didn't want to hear from us."

But Castillo and another member, Debbie DuVal, said they were pleased to see the City Council meeting in their neighborhood.

"This gives us a chance to talk directly to them," Castillo said. "It's so hard for us to get downtown during the day."

DuVal was more enthusiastic.

"It's wonderful that they're here," DuVal said. "A lot of people don't feel they can be in touch with the council and this lets us see them."

The previous meeting of the council away from City Hall occurred last spring in the district of Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, officials said.

Other meetings are planned in the near future for the Pacoima and Highland Park areas.

Under the new City Charter, the council is required to hold 15 meetings a year -- one for each council district -- away from City Hall. Officials said the Wednesday meeting was delayed because of budget deliberations and the swearing-in of new council members.

The council members had to speak over the steady drone of sandblasting equipment from an operator working on the county courthouse in the Civic Center complex.

The agenda for the meeting included a number of local events, which received routine approval, as well as a video presentation on the services available in the constituent service center.