

Los Angeles Daily News

Zine now running for local council

By James Nash

Staff Writer

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After two years as a member of the Los Angeles City Council, Dennis Zine wants to add a much lower position in city government: membership on the advisory West Hills Neighborhood Council.

Zine, who lives in West Hills, would be the first and only Los Angeles City Council member to serve on one of the city's 100 advisory neighborhood councils if he is elected Nov. 5.

Zine said he is running to help save the West Hills Neighborhood Council. Members have threatened to dissolve the panel because of frustrations in receiving \$50,000 in city funds and leasing an office.

"It was either (run) or stand by and watch it dissolve," Zine said. "The last thing I want, as a former charter commissioner who helped design these neighborhood councils, is for any of these councils to dissolve."

City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, however, says it is "inadvisable" for City Council members to serve on neighborhood councils.

In a March 2002 letter to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, which oversees neighborhood councils, Delgadillo wrote that having a City Council member serve on a neighborhood council is incompatible with the neighborhood councils' purpose of grass-roots empowerment for communities.

Delgadillo spokesman Matt Szabo said the city attorney still believes that an elected official on a neighborhood council would "chill the deliberative process." But there are no city rules or laws preventing a City Council member from being on a neighborhood council, and Szabo said Delgadillo would do no more than provide advice on the situation.

Leaders of the West Hills Neighborhood Council said they welcome Zine's candidacy. Members of the group, who said they were fed up with bureaucratic foot-dragging in getting an office and city funding, had considered disbanding the panel Sept. 3 but decided to postpone their ultimate decision.

"I feel there would be some changes because (Zine) would see the frustration everyone has with DONE," said West Hills Neighborhood Council member Barry Seybert, who nominated Zine.

"All the neighborhood councils are trying to get something done while DONE says we can't do anything and holds our hands back."

DONE General Manager Greg Nelson said it would be unprecedented for a City Council member to serve on a neighborhood council and that most of the West Hills complaints are already being addressed.

Stephen Lenske, the interim West Hills Neighborhood Council president, said panel members remain frustrated with the city but consider Zine an ally. He said the council's declaration that it might dissolve -- the first time a council has publicly threatened to do so -- woke up City Hall to the council's frustrations.

"So here we are: another first for West Hills," Lenske said of Zine's candidacy.

James Nash, (818) 713-3722 james.nash@dailynews.com