

## Council Gets Down to the Routine

On top of the everyday issues of neighborhood groups, the Koreatown area had deep rifts to work out. Members hold first meeting today.

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When the Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council holds its first meeting with newly elected officers today, it will have a full agenda to tackle: traffic, potholes, development and preservation.

That may not seem out of the ordinary. But just getting to this point has required enormous effort because of deep rifts over who should be on the council and how influential Koreatown's nightclub industry should be.

For the handful of non-Korean board members, including Karen Hallock, a property manager, the Korean community's interest in the neighborhood council, shown by heavy coverage in the Korean-language news media and the recruitment of thousands to vote in the council election last year, was a surprise.

"The Korean community can really get mobilized," said Hallock, noting that she had no idea what she was getting into when she ran.

"I just wanted to plant trees and beautify my neighborhood," Hallock said.

The territory of the council generally extends from Vermont Avenue on the east to Western Avenue on the west and Olympic Boulevard on the south and Melrose Avenue on the north. It includes 103,000 residents, more than any other of the 84 new council territories formed around the city of Los Angeles in the last four years in an effort to create some local control over government.

Latinos make up 59% of the area's population, Asians 29%, whites 7%, African Americans 4% and others 1%, according to city officials. But with a strong Korean turnout, all but four of the 32 board members elected in December were Korean American.

In February, the board held a highly contested election for officers. Nightclub owners were chosen as president and first vice president. And several other club and restaurant owners are on the panel.

In the race for council president, Nam Kouen Kim, owner of the Live City 4001 club on 6th Street, defeated board member Kee-Whan Ha, a well-known businessman who has a doctorate in electrical engineering from UCLA. A Kim supporter, Shawn Lim, owner of Kar Nak nightclub on Wilshire Boulevard, was elected first vice president.

Yohngsohk Choe, president of Koreatown and West Adams Public Safety Assn., who previously served as an interim member of the neighborhood council, says its elected representatives include too many people from the nightclub and entertainment industry.

"The neighborhood council should not be a venue for owners of Koreatown karaoke bars," he said. "Liquor establishments don't do anything for the community."

Kim dismisses such criticism as unfair, adding that he is a hardworking businessman who wants to represent the entire community, not just nightclubs.

During the campaign for officer posts, Ha accused nightclub owners of selling liquor to minors and violating other liquor board rules.

But nightclub owners denied that and also countered that Ha is a landlord to a karaoke bar owner.

Ha and his supporters said Kim was not qualified to head the neighborhood council because of his poor English.

"How can a man who cannot conduct meetings in English become president of the neighborhood council?" asked Ha, 56, whose financial holdings include the Wilshire Galleria, a supermarket chain and Chapman Plaza.

Kim, 52, responded that, although he may not speak English well, he is studying it and hopes to do much better within six months.

Arriving in Los Angeles 28 years ago, Kim started operating a small coffee shop in Torrance by day and working as a janitor at night.

Today, he owns the North Hollywood Swap Meet, which has 130 tenants, and Live City 4001. He is also planning to open a spa in Koreatown.

"I am not a learned man, but I listen to many people, seek their counsel, try to build a consensus," said Kim. "Once I set a goal, I will pursue it."

He says he considers traffic the No. 1 problem in Koreatown and wants work on that.

Jeff Swanson, a Koreatown resident who serves on the council, said both sides courted him, but he voted for an independent candidate, In-Sop Sim, because he did not want to be part of the "factional thing."

"My reason for coming to the neighborhood council was to get past the split politics," said Swanson, who works in the entertainment industry.

Brendan Finnigan, treasurer of the neighborhood council, said he voted for Kim because

"he was the right person to get the council off on the right foot."

Because no one ran for three of the seats, the council will appoint people to them today. Board members, both Korean and non-Korean, expressed the hope that those seats would go to Latinos.

In December, 1,958 people cast votes, the second-highest tally in neighborhood council elections in the city, according to Melvin Canas, project coordinator for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. The election was originally scheduled for March but was postponed because of complications involving more than 3,000 requested absentee ballots, 2,000 of which had incorrect addresses.

Citywide voters approved a ballot measure in 1999 to create a network of neighborhood councils that would allow residents and business owners to have a greater say, although an advisory one, in important decisions.

Major issues in Koreatown are conditional use permits, liquor licenses and expansion of Koreatown businesses into the residential neighborhoods.

City Councilman Martin Ludlow, whose 10th District includes Koreatown, says Koreatown is the most diverse part of Los Angeles. As a result, the neighborhood council has faced challenges with all "the language barriers, cultural barriers, diverse interests. There is also business and community diversity. All that came together, and here was ground zero," he said. "This council is going to need a lot of support to work through those issues."

At the same time, he said he believes this council can be a "good example" for other neighborhood councils throughout the city.