

Mediation proposed in council dispute

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A special unit of the City Attorney's Office offered Tuesday to mediate the smoldering dispute between the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and the Old Northridge Community Council.

DONE has proposed decertifying the council - one of the first neighborhood councils formed under the new City Charter - over the method used to elect its board.

"Nothing has been decided yet, but we are there to serve the neighborhood councils and help in any way we can," said Avis Ridley-Thomas, director of the City Attorney's Dispute Resolution Program. "We have more than 1,200 people available to serve as mediators."

Ridley-Thomas said she would meet with staffers Thursday to determine whether they should offer to intervene if neither the city nor the Northridge group asks for assistance.

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners is scheduled to consider the decertification proposal at its Sept. 7 meeting.

In a staff report, the department questioned the way the group conducted its last election and whether it was reaching out to represent all of the area's stakeholders.

Jay Christensen, secretary of the Old Northridge Community Council, said he would bring a proposal before the board to take advantage of the Dispute Resolution Program.

"I think it's a wonderful idea, and maybe a way we can avoid any further problems," Christensen said.

Greg Nelson, general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, also embraced the offer.

"They've worked on other neighborhood council issues and maybe bringing in some fresh eyes will give us a solution," Nelson said. "Maybe this is what we need."

Old Northridge officials said they want to remain part of the city's neighborhood council system, and they believe the city is seeking to punish the community council for seeking to be allowed to adapt city regulations to the local community.

The group has poked fun at some of the rules and titles involved in the neighborhood council procedures, calling its chair the "Grand Poobah" and its treasurer the "Bean Counter."

Nelson said he admires the council's creativity, but wants to ensure all residents of the area feel welcome to be part of it.

Each neighborhood council is involved in an advisory capacity to the city and gets early notification on City Council actions as well as an annual \$50,000 budget.

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