

Officials recruit for local panels

By Rick Orlov
Staff Writer

With 86 neighborhood councils operating throughout Los Angeles, officials are reaching out to residents in several pockets of the city — including three in the San Fernando Valley — where it has proven difficult to organize the advisory panels.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is recruiting residents from neighborhoods on the eastern edge of Panorama City, the west side of North Hollywood and the east side of North Hills. DONE also is working to develop neighborhood councils in South Los Angeles.

“What we are finding is that there are these areas of the city that really don’t have a history of involvement through homeowner groups, chambers or other organizations,” DONE General Manager Greg Nelson said. “As a result, we have to go out to try to recruit people to get them involved.”

DONE is working with the Coro Foundation, which operates a program to train individuals to work in government, large corporations and public affairs.

“The challenge has been to involve people who might not have the time or interest and make it worthwhile to them,” Coro Executive Director Carrie Lopez said. “There is a disparity on those who want to become involved and at what level. There are certain roadblocks the city puts up, to make sure all stakeholders are represented, that the area is large enough to have an impact.

“And, we have to convince the people involved that it is worth it even though they are serving in an advisory role.”

Another factor, Lopez said, is a desire to include people who might not have been previously involved in community activities.

“We don’t want just the usual suspects and want to get people who are looking for more than just their area,” Lopez said. “We are trying to get people involved in this experiment and keep them engaged in the process.”

Lopez said the city has received high marks from independent evaluators in what it has been able to accomplish in the past few years.

And, while the neighborhood councils have no official power, they have been able to exercise political influence in forcing the City Council to reverse itself or moderate policies on such issues as police response to burglar alarm calls and increases in water rates.