

## **Valley Glen vote at issue**

Residents debate rules for election

By Dan Laidman, Staff Writer  
LA Daily News  
October 26, 2005

As the Greater Valley Glen Neighborhood Council chooses new officers today, a spat over election rules is underscoring growing pains in the city's budding system of grass-roots democracy.

At issue are themes that resonate for most of the city's more than 100 neighborhood councils: Who is a stakeholder in such community groups? What should their relationship be with City Hall? And should the organizations resemble larger political bodies with their own rigid rules?

The Valley Glen group has clashed with the city before as it has grown into a full-fledged neighborhood council. But now a handful of residents - including a current board member and former election committee members - is threatening to protest the current election.

"We intend to challenge it based on all these myriad of procedural problems," said Valerie Olive, vice president of the board of directors.

Larry Hanna, president of the board, counters that he expects the election to proceed without problems and that most on the board agree with him.

While critics have numerous procedural complaints, their underlying contention is that the election rules are too loose.

"Right now, anybody could walk in and vote," said Laurie Lavine, an early organizer of the group. "You're talking about a very small group of voters. You get one fraudulent vote in there and you just changed the outcome of the election."

They are also concerned that the rules do not set age limits for candidates. "I almost ran my 6-year-old" for office, Olive said.

But Hanna argues that the current system is "more stringent" because it requires voters to sign a form attesting to their stakeholder status under penalty of perjury.

"Valley Glen is a small community, we know the people who live there," he said. "We're not going to see massive fraud. We're not going to see any fraud."

Such a question of stakeholder verification is up to individual councils, said Greg Nelson, general manager of the city's Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

"Actually, we're quite happy that the neighborhood council has gone more toward being inclusive," he said.