

Mayor tries to quell tensions on neighborhood councils

Rick Orlov, Columnist
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There's a rebellion brewing across the city targeting Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the City Council and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.

Fear and paranoia in the community threatens to result in a boycott of the Conference of Neighborhood Councils, scheduled for June 17.

And a number of the original neighborhood councils that were considered models of the system are being torn apart in internal battles.

All this is coming even before the scheduled April 21 retirement of DONE General Manager Greg Nelson and the uncertainty over how his successor will be selected.

Villaraigosa is trying to quell the tensions with assurances of his support for neighborhood councils - which still remain wary of how much support they have from the mayor.

"The mayor does support neighborhood councils and he believes a lot of the concerns neighborhood councils have will be answered soon," spokesman Darryl Ryan said.

Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who has been one of the biggest boosters of the councils, said she also has been urging them to remain calm.

"I know they are concerned because Greg Nelson is leaving and there's some uncertainty," Hahn said. "I think once we have a new general manager in place, that will remove a lot of the angst."

Also upsetting some of the groups is an increase in sparring among some of the neighborhood councils - from Encino to Valley Glen - over who can serve on the various boards.

DONE officials worry the internal disputes are keeping residents from getting involved and hampering the development of broader issues.