

Councils moving too fast?

Valley residents optimistic about panels, but cautious study is urged

By Jason Kandel

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While some believe neighborhood councils will give the San Fernando Valley new opportunities for improvement, others said Tuesday night that the city is moving too fast.

"This is a long way from being done," said Northridge resident Harry Coleman at a neighborhood council formation meeting attended by about 50 people at Northridge Hospital Medical Center.

"You can't go around promising funding or any amount of funding until it's a done deal. So let's not get the cart before the horse," he said.

Officials held the meeting to explain what the councils are and how to form them to provide citizens a greater say in government decisions.

Megan Jones, the neighborhood empowerment project coordinator for the San Fernando Valley, said neighborhood councils will give Valley residents the ability to weigh in on government decisions.

"A lot of people feel disjointed from downtown," she said. "A lot of people aren't informed about legislative issues before they've come and gone, and they don't weigh in on them."

While there are critics, some are optimistic.

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Northridge resident Pat LoPresti, 50, said she volunteered at the beginning of the year to help form her neighborhood council.

"Residents need to have a louder voice in how our local neighborhoods are run," said the Labrador Street resident. "Northridge is a mature neighborhood and the citizens want to enhance and maintain quality-of-life issues."

The City Council approved \$5.7 million last week for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, which is charged with coming up with a final plan and certifying the neighborhood councils.

Officials hope to certify 10 to 20 neighborhood councils in the next fiscal year.

It is estimated that about 25 neighborhood councils are in at least some stage of development in the Valley, Jones said.

There are about 75 in development citywide.