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## Church Seeks to Rename Street After Hubbard

■ **Hollywood:** City Council committee supports Scientologists' effort to change Berendo Street to honor its controversial founder.

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TIMES STAFF WRITERS

What's in a name, anyway?

To some neighbors, Berendo Street in Hollywood is about as good an address as any.

But to leaders of the Church of Scientology that is located there, "L. Ron Hubbard Way" is much better.

In honor of their charismatic founder—a man adherents call "one of the greatest visionaries of the 20th century" and critics call a fraud—the church has quietly sought a name change from the city of Los Angeles.

Just this week the church won an initial endorsement at City Hall, a move supported by the city councilman who represents the area but opposed by critics who see the controversial church stretching its wings a bit too wide.

"People live on the street and if they don't want to be associated with the Church of Scientology, they shouldn't have to live on L. Ron Hubbard Way," said Carla Robinson, a neighbor who successfully fought a similar effort by the church two years ago to name a nearby street after its leader. "I don't think it's appropriate."

But believers say that opponents miss the point.

"I think it's a fabulous idea," said Patricia Castelli, who manages a boardinghouse for church students



RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

The Church of Scientology wants to rename Berendo Street in Hollywood, where many adherents live, to "L. Ron Hubbard Way."

across the street from the complex of blue buildings. "He should be remembered for all that he's done to help people. He's given everybody a road to freedom."

Scientology has weathered controversy practically since its inception in 1954.

Critics accuse the church of being a high-pressure business masquerading as a religion. Yet the church has no shortage of celebrity defenders, including Tom Cruise, Priscilla Presley and John Travolta.

The name change sailed through the City Council's Public Works Committee with barely a wink Wednesday despite a report by a city engineer that said it violates a city policy that recommends against changing the names of portions of streets.

The committee's chairman, Councilman Richard Alarcon, said he gave the matter little thought, approving the name change as a routine item partly because Council President John Ferraro, who represents the area, has endorsed the idea.

A spokeswoman for Ferraro said the councilman favored the change because of the broad support in the immediate neighborhood, which is home to many church members. After receiving the church's petition, the city distributed notices of the proposed name change to

neighborhood residents. Of 192 letters received in response, 183 supported the change, only nine opposed it. The proposal will go before the City Council in about two weeks.

News of the name change began to circulate through the church grounds Thursday. Members cheered and said the honor was long overdue.

"He did so much for the city. I have seen many miracles—getting people off drugs, cleaning up neighborhoods," Marcello Segal, 38, said of Hubbard, who died in 1986.

Still, longtime Scientology critics such as Priscilla Coates see it differently. "Hubbard certainly wasn't any Martin Luther King," Coates said. "Everything that he said and wrote and spoke is considered sacred scripture. I consider it unintelligible."

Some businesses in the vicinity said they did not mind the change. They said that the church's presence has helped clean up a community that otherwise would have been overrun by graffiti and crime. And its thousands of adherents shop in local stores.

"We survive on the church," said Flint Hutchinson, a clerk at a convenience store. "It's a good little economy source. So if they want to make that slight change, why stop them?"