

Sebastopol City Council Meeting – February 17, 2015 – Synopsis and Commentary

It was a double header today! One session to interview applicants for the Design Review Board at 2:00pm and a regular meeting at 6:00pm. Oh Joy!

Design Review Board interviews:

Council Member Eder recused himself to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Most of this wouldn't have been necessary if the Council had accepted, during the last round of interviews, a highly qualified candidate whose major weakness is pointing out, very clearly, what she considers flaws in the Design Review Board process.

Trying to catch the eye of the Council and make the cut were:

1. Joram Altman, a licensed architect who lives in West County
2. Cary Bush** a licensed landscape architect who lives in Forestville
3. Caleb Williams* who applied in the “alternate” category and lives in Sebastopol
4. Peter Daly* who applied in the “alternate” category and lives in West County
5. Gary Criss who applied in the “alternate” category and lives in Sebastopol
6. Avery Kant who applied in the “alternate” category and lives in Santa Rosa
7. Christine Level, a licensed building designer who lives in West County

* Registered Sebastopol Voter

** Holds a City business license

Regular Sebastopol City Council Meeting – February 17, 2015 – Synopsis and Commentary

Public Comment (AKA Open Mike):

Warning: Please be seated before reading this. Some readers may find this disturbing.

No one spoke! The expressions of disbelief on the faces of Council members were exceeded only by the expression on mine.

Discussion and Action Items:

- The Design Review Board business described above was discussed. Making the cut and moving up to the “show” were:
 - Cary Bush, who was seated as a licensed landscape architect
 - Christine Level, who was seated as a licensed building designer
 - [More detailed info at the Sonoma West Times and News.](#)

Consent Calendar Items: (Both items passed without discussion 5:0)

- **Settlement of the CVS proceeds.** Basically, the City and Small Town Sebastopol will receive \$150,000 from CVS (about half of which the City lost in legal fees). Of that, Small Town Sebastopol will receive up to \$32,000 for legal fees, \$45,000 will go to a traffic study and the remainder will be deposited by the City until it, and Small Town Sebastopol, can “agree on the appropriate disposition of said funds.”

There's some language about “intent and purpose” of spending the remainder on “traffic mitigation measures.” That sounds good, but if these measures morph into something that can be seen as directed at CVS, everything is going right back to court. Standby.

- Some storm water control issues were also passed.

Informational Presentation:

The [RCPA](#) gave an update on our collective efforts to get greenhouse gases under control. (Find a [summary of the plan here.](#)) The Council approved, but showed some real concern about the timeline presented.

Well, nothing lasts forever, so there was a **Public Comment** on this item. Basically, it was all a big plot, whatever “it” was. The man mixed his metaphors so thoroughly, the subject of global warming was clouded in a sea of research.

Public Hearing:

Our mid-year budget review finds us roughly on course. And, through a public comment question, we learned that 44% of our general fund comes from sales tax.

The City will send out a request to see if anyone wants to help us build a new City Hall at the downtown parking lot. The plan is that a developer will build it for us and in return get a long-term lease of the commercial space on site. This has evidently worked in several cities in Southern California. [Here's one down by Cambria.](#) We'll see how ours shapes up.

Then came the last item on the agenda – approval of the community benefit grants. What could be easier? Then kaboom!!!! **Council Member Eder** immediately started throwing bombs in the direction of the **Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce**. **Council Member Jacob** also laid down some withering fire in the same direction. And their point? The Chamber had the temerity to chide the Council in a [letter to The Sonoma West Times and News](#). The letter contained no falsehoods.

Council Members Eder and Jacob tried to take cover by asserting that the Chamber had used grant money for a political letter. **They offered no proof of that assertion.** The Chamber receives funds from several sources and is probably wise enough not to break the law by spending grant money on the two bits it cost them to write a Letter To The Editor. **This was nothing more than a ham-fisted attempt to squelch criticism.**

Council Member Jacob's motion to cut off funds died without support from the other three Council members. **Council Member Glass who argued *against* cutting off the Chamber** pointed out that by law, nonprofits are allowed to engage in political action as long as they stay within certain prescribed parameters. She also mentioned that this notion was very close to **restricting free speech.**

It seems to me that free speech **requires** us to support the speech of those who advocate, at the top of their lungs, something that we oppose with every fiber of our being.

A Parting Shot:

When it was brought to Council Member Eder's attention that Mr. Music, a worthy fund recipient, had arranged a concert for the “Open Our Hospital” campaign, **Council Member Eder said Mr. Music's funds should be cut off too.** Well, we'll see about that.

Elapsed Time: 2:45

--John Necker