

# Belmont budget requires no new cuts

## Mini park will get new playground despite neighborhood concern

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — With little drama, the City Council on Tuesday adopted a \$57 million budget calling for no cuts in services or layoffs.

It is the culmination of work that began in February, when the city took mid-year corrections to right the direction of the city's finances. City officials believe that last winter's

correction plan, coupled with the new budget, will stabilize the city.

"This has been a tough time, but we got through it," said City Manager Jere Kersnar.

The council voted to increase sewer rates and establish new fees for a variety of city services. Councilmembers agreed to hold off on assigning fees to set up and take down a large banner across Ralston Avenue. They argued that many organizations advertising with the banner are nonprofit, and the fees would be detrimental.

Councilmember Dave War-

den said that the budget process left the city intact. He noted that other local cities have fared much worse.

"Colma has done better, but they have their special situation," he said. "But we're a normal little city with no other advantage. We have done really well."

Forecasting the city's trends for the next four years, Belmont will be able to maintain its minimum reserve level and build on it, reversing a downhill trend in savings.

In other business, the council sided with young parents and

city staff, deciding to go ahead with installing a new and improved playground at College View Park.

As part of Belmont's playground improvement program, the city will replace outdated equipment at five parks. The suggestion for one at College View Park has pitted neighbors against each other. Some say the proposal is much too big for the area and will draw unwanted noise, traffic and teenage activity. The issue has already come before the Parks and

**BUDGET:** page 4A

## Council notes

• Feierbach's first day: Tuesday's meeting was the first time since November the City Council acted as a whole. Coralin Feierbach was officially installed as councilmember after her June 3 victory. "The election is over," she said. "It's time for us now to do what we were all elected to do."

**Photo, Page 7A.**

## BUDGET

Continued from 1A

Recreation Commission, which gave its unanimous support for an improved playground at the site.

At the meeting, neighbor Judy Sager said that she and the other opponents of the city's brightly-colored improved play structures are just as much in favor of better equipment as anyone, but they want a playground on the same scale as previously — replacing two swings and one slide.

"We've been accused of not caring for children and not wanting a park," Sager said. "We just want like-size equipment."

Supporters of the plan also spoke up, saying that the current playground is targeted for toddlers only. The newer one would benefit older kids as well. They argue that, as it is, the present slide, over 6 feet tall, is unsafe for toddlers. Others said that a renovated park would enhance the community.

"As a homebuyer, the park was a selling point to my family," said supporter Cathy Wright.

In the end, councilmembers also threw their support in favor of the new structure. With no bathroom at the park, they were not convinced that the park would become a destination and draw outside traffic.

Vice Mayor George Metropulos agreed that neighbors may be inconvenienced, but asked how different it would be if a resident next to them threw a loud party.

"People can make as much noise as they want, within reason," he said.

The city will try to curb teenage presence at the park by cutting away shrubbery in the front of the park and will limit noise by closing it from sunset to sunrise.

Contact Michele Leung at 556-1556, Ext. 6 or [mleung@smind-independent.com](mailto:mleung@smind-independent.com).

copy of the budget  
held in the Belmont  
June 26, 03



## *Feierbach takes her council seat*

Coralin Feierbach chats with Marge Warden, mother of councilman Dave Warden, after Feierbach was sworn in as Belmont's newest council member Tuesday night. Later, Feierbach takes her turn to speak (below). George Metropulos, vice mayor, and Paul Wright, the city's mayor, listen on.

SUSAN CALDWELL





# Belmont gets revamped cyber look

City information easier to access

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

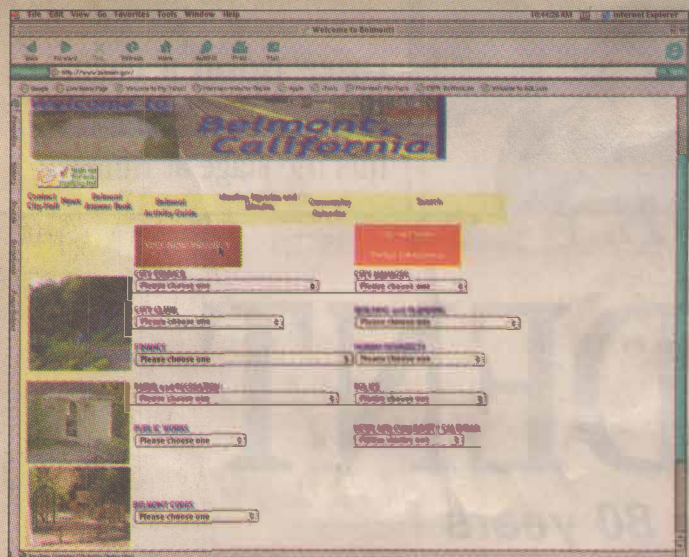
BELMONT — The city is starting the 21st Century with plans for an expanded library, modernized City Hall and police station and a well-defined vision of the future.

A revamped website has become a virtual sign that change is in the air. "We want to make it more useful," said

Assistant City Manager Dan Rich.

The website change was made so information for individual departments would be easier to access, and background facts on the budget and Belmont's visioning process could be highlighted. Commonly requested information such as the activity guides and

**CYBER:** page 2A



SPECIAL TO THE INDEPENDENT

Belmont's website, [www.belmont.gov](http://www.belmont.gov), allows residents to access an array of city services.

## CYBER: Info available

Continued from 1A

agendas are now more obvious.

The website will not eliminate the need to go to City Hall, but there is certainly more to access from home. For instance, there are downloadable forms for business licenses and design review for homes.

Also available for curious minds are handy facts in the Belmont answer guide. Want to know the city's elevation (10 to 750 feet above sea level) or curfew hours for minors? (It's 11 p.m. to 6

a.m. and 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on school days.) Now there is a place to turn for answers.

The website, done in-house, continues to be a work in progress, Rich said, which may explain why some of the links were not up yet. Next to be retouched will be departments' pages. To have a look for yourself, go to [www.belmont.gov](http://www.belmont.gov).

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# Survey says tax to save fields and open spaces will not pass

Belmont task force is disappointed at results

By MICHELE LEUNG  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — Mike Dutto thinks Belmont's 50-year-old athletic fields have served the city well, but it is high time they get some help in aging gracefully.

Fields are soggy on one end and hard on the other and have no adequate bathrooms — these are not proper playing conditions for soccer and softball players.

"They were designed in the fifties," he said. "Some things can't last that long."

Dutto and the other members of the Outdoor Recreation Task Force had hoped to have a ballot measure this November, raising money to shore up the city's fields and the Belmont Sports Complex. But based on

a polling firm's research, passing a two-thirds majority on a parcel tax will be extremely difficult this November.

"I'm a little surprised by the lack of support," Dutto said. "But it's been an on-going thing in Belmont," referring to the defeat of the school's parcel tax last year. "People don't seem to worry about our kids."

Heidi von Szeliski, a senior partner with the firm Decision Research, the polling firm, said that the task force would have a very hard time passing the tax measure because it seems that residents are already happy with the athletic fields and park facilities. If it is not broken, why fix it, residents seem to be saying.

Her firm recently surveyed 400 residents, and in analyzing the statistics broken down according to various demographic groups, no one stood out as being firmly in favor of

a parcel tax.

"There is no group at the two-thirds level or anywhere near it," she said.

When asked how much they were willing to financially support the idea of improving fields and preserving open space, responders answered conservatively. Paying \$20 a year resonated most with the community, but that is nowhere near what the task force had hoped to raise.

Committee members had wanted to charge homeowners \$63 to raise \$7.2 million.

Also, the idea of putting artificial turf on one field at the Belmont Sports Complex did not sit well with the survey respondents, with more than half answering that year-round use at the sports complex would be an unconvincing reason to vote for the measure.

"It seems like a real good way

to stretch the dollar," said task force member Rick Frautschi. "It was a curious thing. When you're on a task force, sometimes you're surprised by the results."

Von Szeliski said that in the end, buying open space and fixing up the athletic fields were issues that are marginally important to voters right now.

"I see it as 'One more darn thing I have to pay for,'" Frautschi said.

The task force had originally wanted to recommend that the City Council put the measure on the ballot this November but is reluctantly scaling back. The group will meet again on June 23 to make their final recommendations to the council.

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See many things  
The Independent  
June 18, 2002

# City increases funding to community

More organizations make requests for money; council doles out \$4,000 more than last year

By WES BOWERS  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — While the city is facing some hard economic times, it was still able to provide a little bit of funding to many non-profit organizations in the county.

Every year, cities take requests from local groups asking for funds for teaching materials, technological equipment or food and clothing.

This year, 15 community

groups requested funding from the city, including Kollage Community School for the Arts, the Belmont Chamber of Commerce, CALL Primrose and the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center.

Two new groups requested funding this year, the Safe Schools Program and Joint Venture Silicon Valley.

The groups requested a total of \$154,940 in funding, but the city could only fund a maxi-

mum of \$112,500. With the city recently learning that it is \$750,000 in the hole, total funding for all the groups was not possible. Still the council increased the amount of money it doled out this year by nearly \$4,000. Last year 13 groups requested \$108,800 in community grants.

"All city, county and state jurisdictions are looking at pretty bleak times ahead," said Mayor Dave Warden. "While all the groups on the list are worthy of the funds they've requested, I'm concerned

about going forward because of the fact we've had to cut back."

Warden said he felt bad that while every city department made some cuts, the City Council is still allowed to approve giving money to the groups.

"All of our city departments have had to cut budgets by about 3.5 percent," said Warden. "Yet they're letting us go forward and approving these requests simply because we're the City Council. I think to spend all the money we have

## groups

in our pot isn't a good idea and I think we shouldn't spend more than our \$112,500 maximum."

To make sure the city does not exceed its maximum allocation for the community groups, Councilmember Terri Cook suggested eliminating the San Mateo County Historical Association from funding, because it had already received seed money in the past.

"Two years ago, they came to us with a request and we

**FUNDING:** page 10A

## FUNDING: Grants awarded

*Continued from 1A*

thought it was just seed money to get themselves up and running," said Cook. "And once you get on the list, it's really hard to take them off. I would take them off the list and one of the new requests I would place funding on is something like Safe Schools."

Safe Schools is the program operated by local police departments where officers are designated to patrol school campuses and interact with students so they feel safe and understand local law enforcement. Council approved \$5,000 in funding to the program, just half of its request.

Out of the 16 groups that requested funding, only two did not receive grants — Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network and the San Mateo County Historical Association.

Councilmember Dave Bauer

said he would have liked to fund all the groups, but the harsh reality of not having enough money has to be taken into consideration.

"All these groups are worthy but the reality is we don't have as much money as we've had in the past," said Bauer. "I don't see how we can fund all of them with the amount of cuts we've had to make across the board."

Mayor Dave Warden explained that it's not easy having to reject some groups' requests.

"It's never an easy decision doing this," said Warden. "We funded what we could and did our best to help everyone we thought worthy, but maybe we can do a little better next year."

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(over)

### Groups that received funding

Group	Awarded	Requested
Belmont Chamber of Commerce	\$34,250	\$50,000
CALL Primrose	\$2,444	\$3,000
Center for Domestic Violence Prevention	\$5,251	\$6,000
Criminal Justice Council of SM Co.	\$2,316	\$2,316
Human Investment Project for Housing	\$19,550	\$20,000
Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network	\$0	\$10,000
Kollage Community School for the Arts	\$11,675	\$20,000
Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center	\$12,384	\$12,384
Peninsula Policy Partnership	\$5,000	\$5,000
Safe Schools	\$5,000	\$10,000
San Mateo Co. Historical Assn.	\$0	\$1,000
San Mateo Co. Jobs for Youth	\$1,500	\$1,500
Shelter Network	\$9,775	\$10,000
Sustainable San Mateo County	\$1,500	\$1,500
Legal Aid Society of San Mateo Co.	\$1,250	\$2,240

# Former mayors share vision for Belmont

Onetime leaders offer own ideas on eve of 'visioning' process

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT - As the communitywide effort to set Belmont's priorities takes flight, former mayors polled by *The Independent* said the future lies in the city's neighborhoods, art and school communities.

The city has assembled several citizen committees to research Belmont's assets in seven areas such as open

space, education and economic development. The work of 72 residents and area business leaders will culminate in crafting a vision statement that is unique to Belmont. City officials hope that the vision will guide future policies and aid in the update of the general plan next year.

Three former mayors, none of whom is involved with this process, shared their thoughts on what they would focus on if they had to find a vision for Belmont.

Gary Harris said the city would do well to move in the

direction of being a university town and find ways to tap Notre Dame de Namur University as a resource. There is currently a formal relationship between the two, but Harris said that the key could be in Belmont being more arts-oriented. One idea, he said, could be a citywide art sale with work from weekend, amateur artists.

"Maybe on the playing fields or in conjunction with the university," he said. "Anybody can come enjoy what local people are doing. These are things that are worthwhile and don't

take a lot of money."

Harris applauded Belmont's citizen participation though he added that it is the same group that shows up all the time. The committees charged with finding a vision are made up of seasoned city leaders and newcomers to city projects.

"Belmont has a tremendous asset in its citizen committees," said Harris, who held the mayor's post in 1997. He cautioned the committees not to let the city staff do all the work.

"My concern is that too often

the committee is so large and people are relying too much on staff and not on internal leaders," Harris said. "Staff gets bogged down and told to do this and do that."

Economic development figures prominently in the past mayors' visions of Belmont.

"That's been going on for 20 years. It's nothing new," said former mayor Donald Heiman, who headed the city in 1986.

Heiman's improvements would include small boutiques, while Adele Della Santina, who held the title in

**VISION:** page 13A

## VISION: Mayors look into crystal ball

Continued from 1A

1994-1995, envisions a downtown lined with benches and trees, much like Carmel's.

"We need the commercial tax base," she said. "We can't have a Macy's, and we're not going to have a Sears. We're too close to Hillsdale. What needs to be looked at are what kinds of stores will survive here and allow for those kinds to proliferate in the area."

To Della Santina, one of Belmont's winning features is its

natural setting.

"Why people live in Belmont - they like the trees, hills, atmosphere. They like the draw," she said.

She urged the committees to stick with whatever plan they produce. Too often, she said, plans are drawn up but followthrough is lacking.

"If they know what they are doing and do it and implement it, a lot can be said if they go forward and bash it out," she said.

The themes the seven committees find in their research will be melded into the vision statement, which will be unveiled on "Vision Saturday," Sept. 6. The community will have opportunities to comment on the vision statement before it is settled.

Contact Michele Leung at 556-1556, Ext. 6 or [mleung@smindependent.com](mailto:mleung@smindependent.com).

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May 20, 03

# Sewage ruins woman's home

Grainger's family wants city to pay for more of clean-up yet to come

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — A Belmont woman forced out of her home after it was flooded by sewage is hoping the city can give her a hand.

Last November, June Grainger's home on Miller Avenue was destroyed when raw sewage was pumped through her house for an hour. It happened as city crews were cleaning the sewer lines and the storm drains.

"The entire living room, the kitchen, the foyer has three inches of chocolate frosting," said her daughter-in law, Wendy Grainger.

Grainger, 79, and her family are frustrated that it has been six months since the incident and she has not been able to move back to her home of 25 years. They say ServiceMaster, the city's contractor responsible for cleaning and

disinfecting, has been slow to get the job done. Her house, which was built by her husband with his own hands, has been gutted inside.

"There are no appliances, no stove or sink. It's totally uninhabitable," Wendy Grainger said.

Up until last week, Grainger had been staying in Hillsborough at her daughter-in-law's rental property. She is currently in a Kaiser hospital in San Jose to get a pacemaker and a mini defibrillator to slow down her racing heart.

Wendy Grainger said she is confident the anxiety of moving out and the stress of dealing with the insurance adjusters and the city has taken a toll on the health of her mother-in-law, whom she described as peppy and energetic before this incident.

"She lost 20 pounds," Wendy Grainger said. "Her clothes are hanging on her. It's been awful for her."

At issue is Grainger's refusal to go along with

**SEWAGE:** page 16A

## SEWAGE

Continued from 1A

her insurance adjuster's settlement offer. She would also like the city to cover more of the expenses. She and her family have been talking with the city, but they say they have gotten nowhere.

Belmont "insulates itself from citizens," Wendy Grainger said.

**'I would like them to say, 'We're responsible, we look at it as our responsibility,' instead of getting a 79-year-old widowed woman to do it.'**

Wendy Grainger

City Manager Jere Kernar said that while he recognizes that Grainger's situation is "awkward," he said the turn of events has taken a normal course of progression. The city has paid close to \$100,000, and when that amount is paid out, he said the insurance company is supposed to take over.

Wendy Grainger said the city should do more. "I would like them to say, 'We're responsible, we look at it as our responsibility,' instead of getting a 79-year-old widowed woman to do it."

City staff will prepare a report for the City Council, which will review this issue at its next meeting on May 27.

Contact Michele Leung at 556-1556, Ext. 6 or [mleung@smindependent.com](mailto:mleung@smindependent.com).



# Belmont staff, residents look to future

## Process leads into update of city's general plan in 2004

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City staff members have identified a list of Belmont's core issues and now they are hoping to generate a road map for the future.

Community Development Director Craig Ewing has assembled 72 people — residents and others who work in the city — to fashion a vision for the city. Beginning later this month, the group will be meeting in committees broken into areas of community, economic development, education, neighborhoods, arts, history and place, and

urban design. Ewing calls the project a search for "Belmont's DNA" and he is looking for themes that will hold true in Belmont today and tomorrow.

"If we succeed, we will see a vision that is Belmont and no other place," he said.

Through the summer, the seven committees will investigate what they think are the city's assets and values in each of those categories. The end result will be a vision statement participants hope will adequately define Belmont. Ewing said establishing a vision for Belmont will aid in making policies.

"We'll translate the vision into broad policies and programs, from which ordinances come," he said.

Ultimately, the process is about finding out what makes a community. Ewing said a city should be more than an entity that provides paved streets and timely trash collection.

"It's to clarify who we are," he said.

To Linda Chiochios, a Belmont librarian, the process is about defining a home.

"People are yearning to have a place, given the world situation, that's what it often comes down to," she said.

Patricia Brown, executive director of the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center, sees the plan as a way to improve on networks among the city's various groups. While neighborhood groups, merchants, schools and businesses have

been pitted against each other in the past, Brown is hopeful the process will foster cooperation for the future.

"Belmont is a place where residents are inclined to give input," she said.

Ewing agreed. As a result of having spelled out Belmont's purpose, city officials will have a standard on which to base their decisions.

"It gives direction," he said. "A vision says 'we all said this is true.'"

Astute residents will notice that traffic does not show up in the seven categories. No reason to worry, Ewing said. It may be addressed when talking about neighborhoods or schools, but he wanted to cast the widest net possible.

VISION: page 4A

## VISION: Planning for city's future

Continued from 1A

"Traffic is not an issue for visioning," he said.

The public will have a chance to weigh in on the work the committees have done. On Sept. 6, dubbed "Vision Saturday," the committees will present their findings to the community. The vision statement will also undergo a test-run at the Art and Wine Festival before being finalized.

The process of developing a vision statement is part of a three-pronged initiative designed

to lead Belmont in the years to come. The second part involves the economic development committee working in tandem with the vision process by brainstorming ways the city can improve the downtown area. Finally, the process culminates in the 2004 update of the general plan, the document that guides the city's policies.

Contact Michele Leung at 556-1556, Ext. 6 or [mleung@smindependent.com](mailto:mleung@smindependent.com).

Belmont -  
The Independent  
May 13, 03





# Belmont entertains new Namur family

## Belgian delegation given key to the city during visit

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — The largest contingent of foreign dignitaries to set foot in Belmont in a long time has come and gone, but people here will not soon forget the friendly invasion.

In celebration of a new relationship between Belmont and sister city Namur, Belgium, a delegation of 21 Belgian city officials and citizens toured the city Tuesday. Everyone left happy.

The Belgians' first official introduction to Belmont began with a break-

fast. No, Belgian waffles were not on the menu. Immediately it became apparent that communication between the two countries would have to be inventive. "How was your flight?" was met with an apologetic shrug and "I speak little English."

Undeterred, the new friends pressed on. The French-speaking visitors were patient. Some of the hosts managed with French, while others relied on Spanish, sign language and stripped-down English. Or they simply waited for the table interpreters to relay the information, not unlike a game of telephone.

Cultural exchange and a better understanding of the two cities were

the themes of the visit. Both cities have a claim to the Sisters of the Notre Dame, who originated from Namur and are the namesake of the university in Belmont. The relationship will continue. Future plans include e-mail pen pals among the elementary and high school students and a tuition-free year at Notre Dame for a Namur student ambassador.

"This is very good timing to start this relationship, because the historical friendship between America and Europe has been seriously damaged recently," said Frederic Laloux, one of the three deputy mayors who made the trip. "We need a lot of talking

TRIP: page 13A



## VITAL STATISTICS

### Namur

**Population:** 105,700

**Other sister cities:** Dakar, Senegal; Ogaki, Japan, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

**Notable facts:** Namur is the heart of the province of Namur and the capital of the region of Wallonia, the French-speaking area in the south. Namur is also the site of the mother house for the order of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

**Unmistakable truths:** During the Roman times, Namur was a busy industrial center for blacksmiths and potters. Its reputation as a military center began in the 16th Century, when Philip II of Spain designated it as a Catholic stronghold to hold back Calvinist influences.

### Belmont

**Population:** 25,000

**Origin of city's name:** Belle montagne et beau mont, French for "beautiful mountain"

**City forefathers:** William Ralston, banker; Walter Emmett, merchant; Colonel Leonardo Cipriani, landowner

**Notable resident:** Conn Findlay, four-time Olympian in rowing and sailing in 1956, 1960, 1964 and 1976, won two gold and two bronze medals.

**Unmistakable truths:** Original inhabitants of the Belmont area were the Ohlone Indians. Incorporated as a city in 1926.

my  
the Independent  
May 3, 2003

# TRIP: Visitors note differences,

Continued from 1A

## but still find common ground in Belmont

between us to clarify some misunderstanding and to ease some resentment."

The tour of the college campus began at 3 p.m., an hour late. But no one seemed too concerned; the cumulative effects of constant traveling were beginning to set in.

This was the last of a 12-day trip in the United States, which included stops in New Orleans and Lafayette, La., one of Namur's other sister cities. By the afternoon, the group had already packed in tours of Belmont, Ralston Middle School (where the animation class was a hit) and Oracle. They had just 90 minutes to digest lunch in order to prepare for yet another eating opportunity.

Laloux, the delegation head, readily admitted he was pooped. One of the women on the trip reminded him that he was one of the younger members on the trip.

"I'm the first to wake up, the last to sleep," he said in French.

Besides the officials from Namur, the delegation included eight Belgian nationals who



SUSAN CALDWELL

Belgian representatives from the city of Namur, Belgium toured Ralston Middle School and attended a reception in their honor at Ralston Hall on Tuesday. Vice mayor of Namur, Belgium Frederic Laloux presented NDNU president Dr. Jack Oblak with gifts from Namur.

— after seeing newspaper ads about this trip to the U.S. — could not pass up the opportunity to visit.

There were also four reporters from local and national Belgian media tagging along.

"I was happy [to get this assignment], but that was before the war started," said Valerie Dupont, a radio reporter. She said that one of her concerns had been anti-

French sentiment, but she experienced none. However, three Belgians who had signed to travel pulled out of the trip for political reasons.

For Dupont, on her first trip to the U.S., the visit was a study in cultural differences. She remarked that streets here are litter-free, that drivers have good manners, that there are fast food joints everywhere and that American food is

heavier and fattier.

"For breakfast, we have simple bread," she said.

The afternoon also featured a gift exchange between Belmont and Namur. Mayor Paul Wright presented the Belgians with a key to the city, and the delegation showered Belmont officials with trinkets symbolic of their hometown.

Some Belmont residents wanted to be on the other side of the friendship someday.

"I'll volunteer to be in the first delegation to Namur," said Pam Clarke, Chamber of Commerce president.

While Belmont did have relationships with sister cities in Germany and Massachusetts, it seemed unanimous that Namur would be the closest.

"The [other relationships] died a sweet death. There was no continuing interest," said Madeline Petersen, who spearheaded the effort to get Belmont and Namur linked five years ago.

There was one groan-inducing mention of Belgian waffles toward the end of the gathering. To their credit, it turns out Belgians are not familiar with this food item.

"Gaufres belges?" radio reporter Dupont said, in conferring with another reporter. "Oh. They had that at Oracle." The day was nearing an end, and despite a good time in Belmont, many were looking forward to being able to spend a night in their own beds after almost two weeks on the road.

Ahead of them was a 15-hour flight home.

"Everything comes to an end," Namur city council member Baudouin Sohier said in French.

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# Belmont taps citizens for fresh ideas

## Group's work will update general plan, governing host of new decisions

By MICHELE LEUNG  
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Citizens will soon have a hand in directing the city's future.

Belmont has tapped commissioners, business owners, residents and university representatives to add ideas for how the city can attract more business to locate in Belmont, with a special focus on downtown development.

"We target the movers and shakers of Belmont, but we know we didn't capture everybody," said Craig Ewing, the city's planning and community development director.

This new Economic Committee, which begins its work in May, will research what opportunities it thinks best fit the city. These economic development strategies are part of a three-pronged process city officials will rely upon to guide Belmont's future.

The Economic Committee will work in conjunction with six other citizens committees, which will look at topics ranging from preserving neighborhoods to furthering arts and urban design. These advisory bodies will write a vision statement for the city, which is to ultimately culminate in the update of Belmont's general plan — a document last renewed 20 years ago.

Ewing said the people he called upon to be part of the Economic Committee are not

short on enthusiasm. Charmaine Hope, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and committee member, said the enthusiasm stems from the city and the community finally coming together to work on a downtown.

"This whole economic development and visioning has been talked about a lot," Hope said. "There's been constant interest in downtown development."

Participant Maureen Freschet attributes the good vibes to coinciding milestones. Besides revising the general plan, the city's commitment to work with Notre Dame de Namur University also bodes well for devising a winning economic strategy.

"We're going to build a residence hall," said Freschet, the university's director of community relations. "What does it mean for the community? What resources do students need from the community?"

Tom Hannen, dean of Notre Dame's school of business and management, hopes residents will come to take advantage of the services the university offers. "I would like to really try to turn Belmont into a university town," Hannen said.

Besides enhancing the university's presence in the city, another goal includes making the city more attractive for businesses. The committee

COMMITTEE: page 12A

## COMMITTEE

Continued from 1A

may choose to work on increasing home property values, bringing more retail sales downtown or targeting a specific market niche.

"It's not enough to redo the fronts of buildings," said Arno Jacobi, a business owner in the Harbor industrial area.

Because the committee has not begun meeting yet, several of the participants said they are not sure yet what strategies they think will be key, but they are optimistic that the committee will think of good ideas. One idea that committee member Chester Fisher is proposing is to focus on Belmont's location on the Peninsula, which he thinks can be a hub of cultural development.

"A very important factor is the fact that we are equidistant from San Francisco and San Jose," said Chester Fisher, director of sales at the Holiday Inn Express. "Perhaps we could become the center of the arts. There is so much opportunity that sits out there."

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City of Belmont  
The Independent  
April 25, 03

# City roads are ranked 'fair' by outside firm

**Big streets in excellent condition, smaller streets score less well**

By MICHELE LEUNG  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — A consultant Tuesday called the city's roads "fair," a rating that commuters have known for years.

Margot Yapp, vice president of Nichols Consulting Engineers, a Santa Cruz-based civil and pavement engineering firm, gave the council a presentation on how Belmont's roads rank compared to other

local cities. Yapp said Belmont was in the bottom third of the cities studied. The firm gave the city's roads a grade of 65 on the pavement condition 100-point index.

"It's not the worst, but it's not the best," Yapp said.

The council agreed that it would be helpful for the city to come up with different scores of acceptability for the busiest streets, such as Ralston Avenue and Old County Road; streets that feed into those busy roads, such as Notre Dame Avenue and Hiller Street; and residential streets.

"It makes sense for us to have a different index for different roads," Councilmember Dave Bauer said.

The Public Works Department will come back in June with a report on beginning a pavement management program.

Half of the city's roadways are ranked in the excellent, good and fair categories, while approximately a quarter of the streets are considered in the poor, very poor or failed stages. Yapp said the latter score is a bit high when compared to other local cities.

Yapp commended the city for improving the quality of major thoroughfares, where scores increased in the late 1990s. That experience was typical in Bay Area cities, when they had more money in their coffers to devote to street maintenance. However, the scores of local streets and roads in the middle tier went down in that time period.

Yapp also advised that, in terms of the cost-effectiveness of road repair, it is cheaper in the long run to do a number of preventative measures, such as

**ROADS:** page 4A

## Council notes

- **Library work:** The Council approved the bid of South San Francisco's Field Paoli Architects to explore what can be done to upgrade the library. The city would like to know what \$7 million, \$8.5 million or \$10 million budgets could do.

- **Sequoia Hospital:** Councilmembers gave support to moving the Redwood City hospital.

## ROADS: Minor streets in need of repairs

*Continued from 1A*

sealing up cracks, instead of reconstructing the road when it has no longer become acceptable. She added that when considering repairs, it is better to spread money around and fix the less-damaged streets, rather than to tackle those in the poorest conditions.

"Don't put everything in the bad streets," she said. That way, while only a few get treated, the majority would still remain neglected and unfixed.

Yapp showed that if the city spent its estimated budget of \$17 million on maintenance over the next 10 years, the quality would improve to a level of 70 from the current score of 65, but so will the cost of the backlog of work.

The cost of the deferred maintenance troubled Councilmember Dave Warden.

"The increase of the backlog costs, I'm concerned that they can't be tweaked. Can we settle for a lower condition index if we reduce the

amount of backlog?" he asked.

To address the concerns of how expensive it would be to maintain the backlogged work, the council also asked for another presentation. This would demonstrate how the city's feeder and local streets would fare if major arteries were maintained at the current index level of 85 and if the amount of the failed streets were no worse than it is now.

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*The Independent  
April 26, 03*

*City of Belmont*  
*April 30, 03*

## CITY SIBLINGS



**MATHEW SUMNER** — Staff

**FREDERIC LALOUX** (right), the deputy mayor of Namur, Belgium, presents Belmont Mayor Paul Wright on Tuesday with gifts from Namur, which is Belmont's sister city and the namesake of Notre Dame de Namur University.

# Belmont welcomes officials from Belgian sister city Namur

**By Tim Hay**

STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — Representatives from the ancient Belgian town of Namur visited Belmont on Tuesday, and were greeted with a lavish party and a key to the city.

Namur is Belmont's sister city, and the visit by 21 delegates — including three deputy mayors and various other officials — was the first of its kind between the two towns.

Namur was settled in the 10th century and called Grognon, or "pig's snout" for the shape of the land it sits on. The city was built where the Meuse and Sambre rivers converge. Located near the borders of Germany, the Netherlands and France, Namur has been invaded, destroyed and rebuilt several times over the centuries.

The town is also where the order of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur was founded in 1804 — the same order that runs the private Catholic college in town.

Sister Pat McGlinn, a history teacher at Notre Dame de Namur University, has visited her order's "motherhouse" in Namur.

"It's one of those things that quiets your soul immediately,"

she said. "I was in absolute awe, being in the same house that our founder, St. Julie Billiart, lived."

The visitors from Namur seemed just as pleased to be in Belmont. At a ceremony at the NDNU's Ralston Hall Mansion, they praised the town through an interpreter for the hospitality they said was free-flowing. They showered city officials with chocolate, wine, perfume, strawberries, figurines and other gifts.

Many of the partygoers vowed to visit Namur soon.

Marcia Harter, a member of Belmont's sister-city committee, said she was changing her travel plans to swing through the city of about 100,000.

"I had plans to visit Europe in 2004," she said. "With all this

connection to Namur, I think I should visit it. These people make Namur a very appealing place."

Belmont passed a resolution accepting Namur as a sister city in 2001. Former mayor Eleanor Hahn traveled there shortly after, and called it "delightful."

Sister cities encourage travel back and forth, and offer mutual hospitality. But the real connection between Belmont and Namur is to be found at the university, where the nuns feel a powerful affinity for the town of their motherhouse.

The university is offering a free year of education for a student from Namur.

Staff writer Tim Hay covers Belmont, Foster City and San Carlos. He can be reached at 348-4329 or by e-mail at [thay@angnewspapers.com](mailto:thay@angnewspapers.com).

# Underground utilities may come to city

Public hearing set for Tuesday; plan would not cost owners

By MICHELE LEUNG  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — Take a good look at the utility poles along Old County Road because some day they may not be there any more.

The city is considering creating an underground utility district that would run from the north end of Belmont south to Harbor Boulevard. Unsightly poles would be hidden from view and run under the streets.

City leaders hope that hiding the poles from view will improve the aesthetic look of the industrial area along Old County Road and encourage additional development.

"It gives it a crisper appearance," City Manager Jere Kersnar said. "When you remove an admittedly ugly feature, it causes property (owners) and perspective owners to see the property differently."

The funds for the \$2.1 million project will come from the amount that PG&E sets aside for cities for this very purpose. The money is held in an account until the city tells the utility company to release the funds for the project. All Belmont residents pay into this fund in their utility rates. The city has also set aside up to \$1 million in redevelopment money to supplement the PG&E money. Property owners are not expected to put up any money during the construction.

One business owner along Old County Road said he is in favor of the proposal, which he said has taken some time because of lack of funds.

"By all means it will dramatically improve the look of the corridor," said Ralph Kirberg, owner of Kirberg Motors.

The project, if approved, is bound to cause a considerable amount of disruption as trenches will be dug along the street. But city officials — and Kirberg — say the benefits would outweigh the inconvenience. Kirberg said the disruption would be similar to that created by the grade separation project to build a bridge at Ralston Avenue. Business owners know what to expect from that experience.

"We're numb to all that," he said of the expected disruption. "I'm sure there's a business owner that won't want that truck in their driveway. They'll be in my nose, too."

## UTILITY POLES: Fewer power outages

*Continued from 1A*

Besides having the potential of creating a visual benefit, running the poles underground will also create fewer power outages. However, they may last longer when they do occur because it will take longer time for crews to spot the problem and repair it.

Residents in the Sterling Downs neighborhood, which borders the affected area,

have given the proposal a collective thumbs up.

"This is a start in the right direction of beautifying," said neighborhood association President William Dickenson. "I hope it becomes contagious to the surrounding environment to make a facelift effect."

Dickenson said he is hoping that the scope of the work will stretch beyond his neigh-

borhood and that the whole city can undergo the same beautifying process.

The city has met with Old County business owners to gauge their interest. There will be a public hearing set at the City Council's next meeting on Tuesday.

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*City of San Francisco  
The Independent  
Feb 11, 03*

# Belmont adopts plan to fix parks

## City leaders hope community supports proposed upgrades

By MICHELE LEUNG  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — The city has now identified athletic fields that need a facelift — which suits Rick Bowman just fine.

Bowman would like to improve on his girls soccer team's second-place league finish from the fall season. The spring season is not too far away for the Belmont Fusion, a U-13 team, but he worries about the conditions of the fields. Besides staring down opponents such as the Stanford Blizzard and the San Francisco Wildcats, his players need to dodge gopher holes and make do with portable bathrooms.

"It's not the safest environment," said Bowman, who plays his home games at the Belmont Sports Complex. "We need to fill in the holes with

sand, and we bring in our shovels. It's an individual effort."

Besides, 13-year-old girls don't enjoy using a portable potty.

The sports complex is one of four fields targeted by the Outdoor Recreation Task Force to get new amenities, such as drinking fountains, new turf and better irrigation systems. The other areas are McDougal Park and the fields at Nesbit Elementary and Ralston Middle schools. The sports complex will be upgraded to a synthetic playing surface.

"They were built in the 1950s, and they're worn out," said Karl Mittelstadt, the city's director of parks and recreation.

City crews will go out and patch up the fields. But thus far, some of the improvements have been undertaken on a private basis.

"As a softball league, we take our money and do what we need to get the fields in better shape. We got new fences and

new benches," said Bill Moyle, a softball coach.

The next step for the task force is to find out if residents would pay for such improvements. In the spring, there will be a citizen survey to gauge how much the city can raise through a ballot measure. Task force members admit that residents may be tired of being solicited for city projects and other community fund-raising efforts, so they will rely on the survey to tell them how much enthusiasm exists for new fields.

"Of course, we all want this, and we hope this is what the community wants and that they'll support this," said Mike Dutto, one of the task force members.

Moyle is careful to guard his optimism. "It would be nice, but with the economy the way it is ... And we know how badly we needed Measure A to pass," he said.

One factor that contributes to the need is that so many

groups vie for playing time. With 4,000 kids in youth leagues throughout the year, plus adult athletes and weekend warriors, every single field is used to the maximum.

"Belmont is not growing new land," Dutto said.

It is his responsibility to schedule teams and their playing time. And sometimes available space does not open up until pretty late. "They want to know why they're playing at 8 o'clock at night," he said.

The task force hopes that with its recommendation of better management, the fields may last longer, even if every foot of turf continues to be used.

That is music to Bowman's ears. "Our concern is how to attract good players," he said. "These conditions are not where good players want to practice.

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# Belmont will survive state money woes

## City officials hope to spare residents from cuts to key municipal programs

By MICHELE LEUNG  
*Independent Newspapers*

BELMONT — Officials here have released their mid-year budget report, saying the city is in good shape to weather the state's gathering financial storm.

The city is planning to trim \$1.3 million from its budget by reducing the levels of service and new hiring.

And that is the good news. More drastic cuts may yet be necessary. "This is the best it's going to be," said City Manager Jere Kersnar.

The city hopes to cut costs behind the scenes, sparing popular public programs while raising revenues and reducing some services. Residents may miss some Parks and Recreation offerings. The department's activity guide, which has been going out on a quarterly basis, will now be mailed out three times a year. Also, the community calendar will now be found online only. The staff recognized that it would not be worth the cost to print a publication that is tossed away quickly.

"We knew the community calendar is expensive to produce," said Mary Doherty, recreation supervisor. "Not worth the cost, so we look at the cost versus the benefits."

Doherty said it was not too difficult for her staff to pinpoint where to make cuts, and she hopes Belmont residents will not be inconvenienced.

"There are other ways to get the information," she said. "Everybody has access to the web, so we feel pretty good about this."

Other ways the city is cutting back is to eliminate a police canine handler and reducing staff overtime.

City officials will be looking closely at the action in Sacramento. If the governor goes ahead with his proposal to take away cities' portion of the vehicle license fees, Belmont stands to lose another \$1 million, enough to pay for a third of police patrol costs. But city leaders say they will only make additional cuts when such cutbacks are handed down from Sacramento.

"We feel good about this package. We can implement it, and the results are achievable," said Thomas Fil, the city's finance director. "The \$1.3 million is certain, and we don't know for sure about the \$1.1 million. You can only respond to what you know and prepare for it."

Should Gov. Gray Davis trigger the loss of the cities' share of the vehicle license money, Belmont's contingency plan calls for more drastic measures. City offices would close from Christmas to New Year's, and city officials would put a measure on the November 2003 ballot for a utility tax to raise additional funds. If the measure fails, layoffs will be

BUDGET: page 11A

## BUDGET: Hard choices

*Continued from 1A*

considered, which has been Kersnar's last resort.

"The public will need to make a decision about the services they really want to have," he said.

Like all local agencies, Belmont officials say they are already working with a lean budget and that there isn't much flexibility left anymore. Unlike other cities on the Peninsula, Belmont gets limited revenues from retail, sales and hotel taxes.

"This is not a city government that has a lot of money," Kersnar said.

In their frustration of having to deal with the state deficit, city leaders have been taking shots at Sacramento and urged their legislators to spend within their

means. They argue that what is good for the municipal goose is good for the state gander.

"While we have maintained strict fiscal policies annually, the state has not done so," said Finance Director Fil. "This [state] plan will not rectify this, and we'll be at this again."

Despite the gloomy forecast, Fil is confident that the city has planned ahead enough and the mid-year budget plan will carry it through. "We feel good about this package. We can implement it, and the results are achievable," he said.

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*City of Belmont  
The Independent  
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# Belmont tightens belt as financial picture worsens

■ Balanced budget of 2002 a thing of the past as \$1.3 million deficit looms

By Tim Hay

STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — Last summer, this affluent town of about 26,000 did what few cities on the Peninsula were able to do: it passed a balanced budget.

But what a difference a recession made.

In just a few months, a \$1.3 million gap has opened between what Belmont is spending and what it is bringing in, and the cuts city officials have been dreading will likely become a reality later this month.

City Manager Jere Kersnar has put together a package of revenue increases and budget slashes he hopes will put the city back on track.

"The kicker here is that none of this is due to state action. If the state comes after us, we'll have to take more cuts — and the next round, you'll start to feel it," Kersnar said.

Property tax collections in Belmont, which were up almost 5 percent last fiscal year, have plummeted since several high-tech firms scaled back operations or went out of business, the city's budget director has said.

The city's retirement system has also taken a beating on Wall Street as the recession has dragged on, and payments into it from city funds have been steadily climbing.

Kersnar's plan is to raise revenues by \$468,000 — by doubling garbage-collection fees and hiking ticket prices for the town's annual Art and Wine Festival — and save \$831,000 by transferring funds and cutting spending.

One agency that will shoulder some of the cutbacks is the Police Department. Police Chief Greg Janke said he offered to freeze a vacant officer's position to the tune of about \$75,000, and cancel about \$2,000 for a part-time chaplain to counsel patrolmen.

"We still have volunteer chaplains," Janke said. "And if we de-fund one police officer position, we'll still get by OK."

Janke said there are usually a sergeant and three officers on the street at any given time, and that there is usually a vacancy in the department. The city funds the vacant position, but gets the money back at the end of the year if it isn't filled. Kersnar's proposal is to simply hold on to the money, as the Police Department is functioning smoothly.

Janke said freezing more positions — a possible scenario if state lawmakers take money from cities to balance California's budget — would be sharply felt.

"The Belmont Police Department has never functioned with a lot of fat. We're a lean organization, and any cuts would go right to the bone," he said.

Kersnar's plan also calls for reducing funding to organizations like the Chamber of Commerce by 10 percent, and halting all computer upgrades and technology purchases.

The City Council is scheduled to vote on the plan, which Kersnar hammered out with the town's department heads, at their Feb. 25 meeting. The public is invited to speak on the measures.

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