

BELMONT  
CITY COUNCIL  
REDWOOD CITY TRIBUNE  
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# Wine and Dine Fight Splits Council Again

## 3-2 Votes Show Rift in Belmont

BELMONT — Four motions, aimed at outlawing Belmont's dinner-and-drink pre-meeting caucuses, were beaten down by identical 3 to 2 votes as the city council split wide open for the second straight time last night.

Councilman Wallace Benson, defending the practice of eating and drinking at the Villa Chartier at taxpayers' expense, was joined by Mayor Charles H. Cook and Councilman Ildo L. Rosellini in killing the legislative maneuvers.

By taking their "expenses" out in bar and dinner tabs at the Villa, Councilman Benson argued, the council is saving the taxpayers untold hundreds of dollars in expense money.

This was the tack the former mayor took in explaining the "wine and dine" policy of the majority of the present city council.

Benson addressed himself specifically to freshman Councilman Robert S. Hunter's questions posed two weeks ago about the Villa bar and dinner bills run up by councilmen each month at study sessions.

But, in spite of Benson's defense of previous council policy the minority council member—Hunter and George L. McCain—attempted, without success, to have the present practice drastically changed.

They offered, and each time lost, four motions. All of them were beaten down by 3 to 2 votes—Mayor Charles H. Cook, and Councilmen Ildo L. Rosellini and Benson casting the "Nay" votes.

### The motions asked:

1. That councilmen responsible for approval of warrants submit a written report clarifying Villa Chartier charges.

2. That the city attorney (Paul A. McCarthy) be asked for a written opinion on the legality of spending city funds for alcoholic beverages.

3. That City Administrator Fred J. Nelson write the Villa requesting the city's credit card be cancelled.

4. That any expenditure exceeding \$25 be authorized in advance by the council, and that anything under \$25 be allowed only after a detailed report of actual expenses has been submitted.

In another hot-tempered exchange, bouncing back and forth between councilmen before a jam-packed council chamber, Mayor Cook, at one point, seething with indignation declared:

"If I thought for one moment that you (Hunter) were inferring I was doing anything wrong I'd whack you

across the teeth right in an open meeting!"

It was after Cook's declaration that the council beat down all four of the Hunter-McCain motions.

Prior to the verbal fistcuffs, Benson as chairman of the finance committee introduced and gained unanimous backing for a series of three suggestions.

First, he moved that \$75,000 be transferred from the city's commercial account to a savings account in order to accrue interest at the rate of 1 1/4 per cent.

The Cook-Benson-Rosellini triumvirate, which dined again at the Villa last night (sans liquor) on chicken and beef dinners with City Administrator Fred J. Nelson, re-echoed their contention of two weeks ago—in effect that more worthwhile city business is done over cocktails than over a desk.

The Hunter-McCain faction, which ate roast beef sandwiches at its own expense at the Lariat with Acting City Engineer Robert L. Tilley before the meeting, reiterated the stand that using taxpayers' money for dinner and drinks is wrong.

The decidedly diversified views were expressed after Benson made his last two points.

He asked City Atty. Paul A. McCarthy (who didn't attend either dinner) to investigate the feasibility of dissolving the interests of the city being able to say where lights are to be installed, instead of the county holding the upper hand.

His final suggestion, also accepted unanimously, was the naming of W. K. Davey as tree warden and consultant. He is to serve without fee.

During the debate over the "wine and dine" practice, Hunter made a special point of declaring that neither neighboring San Carlos, nor Redwood City indulge in such charge accounts as Belmont's Villa deal.

"No member of this council has ever submitted an expense account," was Benson's clipped reply.

Benson told of making two trips to Sacramento and several to San Francisco on city business without receiving any remuneration.

"If we had submitted the requested certificates (on expenses), it would have come to much more than the \$1,350 allowed in the budget," he declared.

Benson admitted, somewhat caustically, that by smoking and drinking he must be a "bad man . . . very immoral."

By expending the \$1,300, Benson opined, the city gained far more by meeting with officials of other cities, the state and county.

"But what do they do here?" Benson asked a silent crowd of spectators. "They call you a crook by inference."

The caucus, which Benson said is open to the press (even at the Villa), is held as a pre-regular meeting, just as it is in other cities, to avoid arguments on the council floor.

(The fact that the Villa meetings are open to press coverage was established by this reporter when he was welcomed on two occasions in the past several months.)

"There's only one way to stop (the present practice of Villa pre-meeting dinner caucuses)," Benson declared. "You can recall me, and I'll personally offer a cash prize to the person getting the most signatures on the recall petition."

(OVER)



**BEEF IN THE ROUGH**—The minority council, Robert S. Hunter and George L. McCain, held their pre-meeting business session in the city hall. Here they go over their plans for last night's meeting. Later, they joined City Engineer Robert L. Tilley for a roast beef sandwich

—Tribune Photo by Reg McGovern (which they paid for themselves) at the Lariat in Belmont. It was Hunter who dropped an epistolary time bomb in the city hall two weeks ago, questioning the time-honored practice of councilmen eating and drinking at city expense at the Villa Chartier in South San Mateo.