

Belmont
(Notes)
March '79

Belmont 'walkout' delays action on lot sizes

The Belmont City Council Monday night took up the controversial issue of separating lots, and then everybody split.

Councilwoman Meg Buckley, recuperating from a hospital stay, was not present.

Councilman Frank Gonsalves, who owns a lot involved in the situation, left his chair and joined the audience.

As the issue was debated, Councilwoman Pam Ketcham departed.

That left the council with only two seated members — not enough for a quorum.

Mayor Walt Worthge suggested that since the meeting no longer was in session, that Gonsalves join the council again and that the entire issue be put over, which it was, to April 9, the next meeting.

Property owners attending the meeting made no attempt to hide their frustration.

One irate landowner declared, "This is a sham, a farce. This matter has been continued time and again.

"Every time we come here for redress, we end up with a City Council that does not exist. Everything that should be accomplished is being set aside."

Mrs. Ketcham had asked for a continuance so that the council could meet in a study session on the problem, but had run into opposition from Worthge, who said that since the action still would come up for final approval in two weeks, there

would "be plenty of time to deliberate."

Some time ago, the state mandated merging of small lots with adjacent lots under certain conditions, and the city went ahead on that basis. Later, the state reversed itself, and allowed the city to "unmerge" the lots, a process it is now undergoing.

Meanwhile, the confusion has been such that lot owners are confronted with a complex set of problems as to where they stand.

Charges and countercharges have flown at council meetings.

Both women members have asked for study sessions. It was when Gonsalves rose in the audience and supported Worthge on not having a study session that Mrs. Ketcham walked out.

Prior to that, Worthge had asked action on a resolution making findings and determinations, and approving a negative declaration of City Planner Neal Martin regarding the separating of lots and parcels of land.

Mrs. Ketcham said she thought there ought to be an environmental impact report rather than a negative declaration.

In the discussion, it developed that the planner had prepared the negative declaration because he was asked to by the council. Even that was debated. Mrs. Ketcham indicated she felt it was something Worthge had asked for, rather than the council.

Worthge said he felt that an environmental impact report could drag the whole thing on for months. He thought there should be a moratorium on building on the lots while the council completed a general plan in July, while a negative declaration was accepted to speed things up, the councilman said.

This would allow people to sell their lots, he added.

After reconvening, the now all-male council group agreed to take testimony from landowners relative to legal complaints about the merging of their lots, lots, and finally continued the recording of complaints to April 12, at a special meeting.

The meeting, which ran four hours, opened on a much happier note.

This was a special commendation by the council given to Police Lt. James Scales.

Remarking on his "continued outstanding service to the city," the council congratulated him for outstanding and faithful service.

In particular, the council noted that through "professional" use of his hypnosis, Scales had provided the means to solve a rape-by-fraud case in January and the apprehending of two murder-rape suspects in Burlingame March 8.

He has given outstanding service as head of the detective bureau, the council declared.

SM Times Dec 12, 1978

Times 12-12-78

Gonsalves Defends Land Use Stand

Belmont Councilman Frank Gonsalves defended his awkward position Monday night in a controversial land-use dilemma and vowed to fight harder than ever to straighten out the confusion of merged lots throughout the city.

Gonsalves, who stepped from his council chair and stood at the public podium to make his statement, then left the meeting to avoid what he called further "intimidation" and conflicts.

The council also heard several residents — some of them in positions similar to Gonsalves' — urge that they adopt an ordinance as soon as possible that would separate many lots merged together two years ago.

"This situation has been embarrassing and frustrating," Gonsalves said of his own experience. "To avoid future and similar predicaments, the system must be corrected.

"Obviously, I am not alone in this matter. Numerous situations that are similar to mine can be cited," Gonsalves added.

He flatly rejected the request of one resident who had told him he should resign.

"This administration should have made a public apology for putting me in this abusive position," Gonsalves told the council.

Gonsalves, a councilman since 1977 and an architect by profession, is building a second home on a lot he owns on Lyndhurst Court. It is adjacent to the lot on which his current house stands.

It was discovered two weeks ago by a few Belmont residents that the two lots were merged into one

under provisions of the state Map Act. The act calls for the merging of two or more contiguous lots when at least one of them is substandard — meeting less than the minimum requirements for development.

Consequently, Gonsalves' construction plans apparently result in two homes being situated on one single-family lot, an illegal situation.

The councilman was attacked by residents who didn't believe Gonsalves — as an architect, councilman and former planning commissioner — didn't know one of his lots was substandard and that the two had been merged.

He was accused of ignoring the law in proceeding with construction of the house.

Gonsalves argued Monday that he didn't know the smaller lot was substandard. And, since he was given a building permit by the city building department, he assumed his application was proper, he said.

"There was no intentional wrong-doing, coercion or collusion used on anyone's part to achieve the permit," the councilman said.

"Although it was the responsibility of others to determine lot deficiencies, no blame should be directed toward anyone because the state Legislature's merging of lots has created and is still creating confusion among many staff members as well as council members," he added.

Some property holders have sold individual lots not realizing they had been

merged with another, Gonsalves noted. And homes like his own have been constructed on the basis of old lot lines, ending up with two or more homes on what is now a single lot.

One resident asked if a stop-work order has been placed on the Gonsalves lot.

City Attorney Ken Dickerson said the merger isn't official until a public hearing — scheduled Jan. 22 — is held. There's always a possibility the property owner could prove at that time that the merger was incorrect and the city might then be held responsible for the construction delay, Dickerson said.

"You may be exposing the city to some liability if you are wrong," the attorney related.

The ordinance reviewed by the council for the first time Monday night would separate lots that meet at least one of these circumstances:

- 75 percent or more of the 10 lots on each side of those in question have been legally developed with "substantial improvements."

- The merged lots are 25 percent larger in area than a minimum lot size required by that particular zoning.

- Each of the merged lots has been built on with the approval of a city building permit.

"It's a hideous tangle of common titles," said resident Joe Zucca in criticizing the present situation. He asked the council to "show some compassion" since, he said, many people have been innocently hurt.

However, one resident, Hartley Laughead, ques-

tioned just how many people with merged lots are complaining. She suggested it's only a small minority.

City Planner Neal Martin said about 320 lots were merged in the San Juan Canyon area alone. Merged lots elsewhere in the city were never publicly identified in mass, causing the present state of confusion.

Mayor Walt Worthge reacted angrily to the attack on Gonsalves. He urged Belmont residents not to jump to conclusions and "not to try issues in the newspaper." The best method to debate an issue, he said, is on the council agenda.

SM Times March 9, 1979

Belmont Property Not Exempt; Ruling

Belmont City Attorney Ken Dickerson has ruled that parcels owned by Councilman Frank Gonsalves and many other property owners throughout the city were not exempt from controversial lot-merger laws, as the councilman's attorney had claimed.

However, whether Gonsalves — who is in the midst of building a house on a lot the city claims was merged with his adjacent lot two years ago — will contest that ruling is uncertain.

Gonsalves' attorney, Don Costello, had said last month that the councilman's two lots on Lyn-

dhurst Court had not been merged to form one lot because of a provision of the local zoning ordinance involving "lots of record" and exempting those that meet "minimum parcel size."

However, Dickerson said he understood the Government Code section involving mergers to mean that lots not meeting minimum standards for parcel size are indeed merged if contiguous with another lot under the same ownership, a situation that applies to Gonsalves' properties.

The City Council met Thursday night to again consider the possible criteria for "un-merging," or separating, lots throughout

the city that were affected by the 1977 state law.

At that time, some 300 lots in the San Juan Canyon area were determined to have been merged into about 94 lots, pursuant to the state law. As a result, many property owners found that where they thought they had owned two or more lots, they only owned one, thereby decreasing the resale value of their property.

Since then, the council has been focusing on mergers that occurred elsewhere in the city, frequently without the property owner's knowledge. Gonsalves has claimed he was unaware his properties had been merged when he obtained his building permit and began construction.

City Planner Neal Martin explained Thursday that he is aware of eight building permits in all that have been issued under circumstances similar to Gonsalves'.

Throughout the city, including the San Juan area, a total of 440 lots have been merged into only 147 lots, Martin declared.

One resident, however, doubted that the statistics on merged lots are complete. Judy Nowak said she owns three lots that she knows have been merged by the state law. However, she said she also is sure they were not included in Martin's inventory because she was never notified of their merger.

In addition, she said she believes there are many others on her own street subject to merged lots that also have not been counted.

"When you merge property, you are taking away personal rights," Mrs. Nowak said. "You have a moral obligation to let people know who have (had their property) merged."

San Mateo Times
January 12, 1979

San Mateo counties. Board, Depore said.

SM Times 1-12-79

Computer Lawsuit Plans Live

Plans for a lawsuit against Belmont City Manager James DeChaine and the bonding company which represents him seeking the recovery of some \$35,860 over alleged computer "mismanagement" have not been rescinded, according to attorney Robert LaFranchi.

LaFranchi said he met with City Attorney Ken Dickerson as the City Council had requested but the con-

ference failed to alter the planned lawsuit.

LaFranchi, representing Belmont residents Lida Paetzke "and other residents and taxpayers of the city of Belmont," had notified the council the suit will be filed if DeChaine and his bonding company don't reimburse the city some \$35,860 by 5 p.m. Monday.

The council, after several execu-

tive sessions, took no position on the suit and asked only that Dickerson meet with LaFranchi to explain the council's point of view.

There was no public explanation of the council's reluctance to take a position on a lawsuit that appears to mean the recovery of money for the Belmont coffers.

"As of this point, our position remains the same," said LaFranchi.

Son Mateo
James
January 19, 79

Belmont Mayor to Make His Move

Belmont Mayor Walt Worthge will seek the removal of Mark Reeves from the city's General Plan Review Committee at the City Council meeting Monday night.

"I'll state all the reasons on Monday night in the public meeting," Worthge said today.

He said he will give Reeves a chance to present his own position.

Worthge did confirm that he is seeking Reeves' ouster because the latter is spearheading an initiative campaign aimed at setting an annual ceiling on construction in Belmont.

The initiative effort by the Citizens for Orderly Growth — which

will be officially launched on Saturday — seeks a limit of 56 new dwelling units a year.

The General Plan Review Committee has been working with the Planning Commission and City Council to update the general plan

and possibly come up with a growth ceiling recommendation apart from the initiative.

City Manager James DeChaine has recommended a construction ceiling of 140 units a year.

Although Worthge would not cite

his reasons, it is known that many city officials believe Reeves has placed himself in a conflict-of-interest position.

Worthge said he asked Reeves to resign from the committee and Reeves refused.

Reeves was not available for comment this morning but has said in the past that he does not find his two roles in conflict.

His initiative effort, Reeves has said, will actually save the city time and energy in trying to devise a growth limit that satisfies the public.

prove a claim
license.
S.M. Times
1-19-79

FC Plan OK OK P H

RC Tribune
Feb 6, 1979

Belmont seeks answers behind closed doors

By Terry Robertson

A meeting closed to the public has been called by the Belmont City Council for Wednesday night ostensibly to discuss legal issues concerning two lots that have been merged into one by a quirk in a state law enacted two years ago.

The meeting was requested by the attorney of Councilman Frank Gonsalves who happens to own the lots in question. But the request, made in writing to the council, was simply to discuss the matter "with the appropriate city officials," not necessarily in executive session (another name for closed meeting).

The City Council chose to schedule the executive session on the grounds that the wording in the letter from Gonsalves's attorney, Donald Costello, that "there are legal and factual issues which require analysis and resolution" could

be construed as a potential lawsuit against the city.

That the council can even legally call an executive session in this matter is questionable.

Under the Ralph M. Brown Act passed by the California State Legislature in 1954, locally elected officials can meet behind closed doors only under special circumstances. Those circumstances include issues dealing with personnel matters, threats to national security and actual lawsuits against local jurisdictions.

The Brown Act is based on the concept of the people's right to know what their elected officials are up to. This particular issue concerns Frank Gonsalves in his role as citizen rather than Frank Gonsalves in his role as councilman.

How easy it would be, however, for a legislative body to meet, hidden from the public view under the auspices of a potential lawsuit, in order to protect one of its own from

... more opinion

the public's judgment.

This is not to suggest that the intent of Belmont's City Council in this instance is to protect Councilman Gonsalves from anything. It can be suggested, however, that by scheduling the closed meeting, councilmembers, including Gonsalves, are leaving themselves wide open for this kind of speculation.

There are already enough rumors buzzing around the housing tracts of Belmont questioning Gonsalves's entanglement in this issue without adding to them.

Gonsalves found himself caught in a land use tangle two months ago that has pla-

gued other unknowing Belmont residents. A state law which took effect in January of 1977 merged all adjacent lots under one ownership if one of the lots was not developed and did not conform to zoning requirements.

City officials did not realize that the law affected quite a number of land owners in Belmont until quite recently and are now attempting to find a way to unmerge those lots starting with a dozen hardship cases.

Among those hardship cases is the Gonsalves property. Gonsalves was granted a building permit by the city's planning department to build a home on the lot that was merged with the lot on which his family home sits. He has been building on it ever since — technically an illegal situation.

He has defended himself by claiming to be as unsuspecting about the lot mergers as about 225 other victims of the state law in Belmont. He also has come close to calling planning department officials inept for issuing the building permit without informing him that his lots were merged into one.

Still the whisperers continue to ask, "How could a councilman obtain a permit from

the city's planning department to build a home on a lot that is illegal without using his position on the council to put on pressure?"

Considering council action such as scheduling an executive session for an issue that should be out in the open, it is understandable that these kinds of rumors persist.

It should be almost second nature that elected officials' actions should not only be above the law, but should also appear so beyond any doubt.

Councilman Gonsalves, as well as the entire council, can only come out ahead in the eyes of the residents of Belmont by keeping Wednesday's meeting concerning Gonsalves's property open to the public.

City Council
6 Feb 1979

ULTIMATE
FEB. 14, 1979
REDWOOD CITY TRIBUNE

Belmont: Words, fur flying

FEB 14 1979
4
By Terry Robertson
Tribune Staff Writer

BELMONT — An already stormy city council meeting last night ultimately blew up into a raucous yelling match amid charges by two councilmembers that Councilwoman Pamela Ketcham attempted to bribe them with vote trade-offs in separate telephone conversations.

Mrs. Ketcham, in turn, accused Councilman Frank Gonsalves of trying to influence her vote on an issue affecting a lot on which he is building a home. She also charged him with gaining favoritism from the city staff in connection with his lot.

The 10-minute flurry between Councilmembers Gonsalves, Ketcham and William Hardwick came at the end of a meeting dealing primarily with the unmerging of certain lots including two owned by Gonsalves.

It ended only when Gonsalves's attorney warned the council that the accusations were felonious in nature and should be discussed elsewhere.

Mrs. Ketcham was charged by both an angry Gonsalves and an unruffled Hardwick of offering to be the swing vote to unmerge the lot on which Gonsalves is building in exchange for a vote to oust City Manager James DeChaine.

Wanting for some time to fire DeChaine, Mrs. Ketcham has never been able to muster the necessary three votes required for such a move.

Gonsalves, who abstained from the voting on the lot unmerging issue to avoid conflict-of-interest violations, was sitting in the audience. He charged that Mrs. Ketcham also told him in the phone conversation, "If you want your lot unmerged, I want you to resign."

"I hope you taped the conversation because we have different interpretations," retorted a surprised Mrs. Ketcham.

"Don't give me that. You handed the same bribe to Hardwick," Gonsalves yelled back angrily. He

then turned to Hardwick who nodded affirmatively.

Mrs. Ketcham refused to back off, though.

"I've had many conversations with you about getting rid of DeChaine. It's no secret what my feelings are on that," she said. "But how can you call me to see what my vote will be on an issue involving your property? That's improper."

At that point Hardwick joined in.

"One thing Pam said was that 'If you promise to vote to get DeChaine out on Monday night (actually last night), then you'll get my vote.'"

"I guess it's your word against mine," replied Mrs. Ketcham.

Hardwick added that Mrs. Ketcham told him that a packet had been sent to the county grand jury concerning the Lyall Way project, another controversial issue concerning an apartment complex in Belmont for which Gonsalves is the architect. She also allegedly told him that a petition was circulating to recall Gonsalves.

"What you did is unethical and illegal as far as I'm concerned," Hardwick advised Ketcham.

The discussion ended at that on the advice of Gonsalves's attorney, Donald Costello. "You're talking of felony charges here," he said. "I'm suggesting this is just not something to play around with for the Belmont papers. This is a serious subject."

The eruption began minutes after Mrs. Ketcham explained her negative vote on an ill-fated ordinance involving Gonsalves's lot and accused him of gaining favoritism from the city's staff for being allowed to build on a merged lot that technically no longer exists.

The issue of lot mergers has been an emotional one here since a state law which took effect in January of 1977 merged all adjacent lots under one ownership if one or more of them was not developed and did not conform to zoning requirements based on their size. The law, which has affected about 235 mostly unsuspecting Belmont

residents, essentially eliminated the substandard lots, rendering them unbuildable.

The council was attempting to pass a series of ordinances which would have provided the initial steps to unmerge eight merged "hardship" lots. These are lots that had mistakenly been either sold by landowners in ignorance of the law or had erroneously been issued building permits and are in various phases of development.

Gonsalves's lot falls in the latter category. The ordinance to unmerge his lot failed 2-2. Councilmembers Ketcham and Margaret Buckley voted no.

"One does question why Gonsalves didn't know (that his lot was substandard) and it's a question of just where the problems (in the issuing of permits) are," Mrs. Ketcham said in an often rambling explanation of her vote. "Of the three or four ordinances before us, there is only one where building is going on.

"The others were sold. Why the favoritism? I don't want Mr. Gonsalves to be stopped, but he shouldn't be given favoritism."

Then it was Gonsalves's turn.

"You've constantly come across as Mrs. Righteousness," he told her barely able to hold his temper. "You should stop and think about this game playing of yours.

"You just don't play games with people's property like that."

Earlier in the meeting, Costello, who is representing Gonsalves on the lot merger issue informed the council that Gonsalves's and possibly others' lots may not have been merged due to a grandfather clause in the zoning laws.

When areas of the city are rezoned, making one lot substandard as in Gonsalves's case, then the grandfather clause goes into effect and counteracts the merger law, he said.

The council instructed the city attorney to consider Costello's statements and report back at their Feb. 26 meeting.

SM Times
March 13, 1979

Decision on Belmont lots ^{SM Times 3-13-79}

Belmont's controversy over merged lots reached a turning point Monday night as the City Council voted 4-0 after a tumultuous three-hour hearing to separate all affected lots.

But, the vote apparently was far from the last word on the issue.

The council's action was only to introduce a separation ordinance, and a final adoption vote is to take place at the next council meeting, March 26.

And, it appeared that the council members are in disagreement over the conditions that would be attached to the blanket ordinance to separate all of the more than 400 lots involved.

Property owners who packed the council chambers cheered when it

appeared that what they have been seeking for months, separation of lots forced together against their wishes, was going to occur.

If the council does adopt the ordinance in two weeks — which now appears unlikely — they would be sending back to the drawing board an effort to control development of Belmont's many substandard lots, those that meet less than minimum requirements for development.

At one point, Councilman Frank Gonsalves, himself caught up in the merger controversy through his own two lots on Lyndhurst Court, offered to sacrifice his own property to break a 2-2 council deadlock.

Gonsalves, angered at the two councilwomen for voting against an ordinance to "un-merge" many lots

based on specific criteria, said he would exclude his own property from the issue, making him eligible to vote and break the tie.

"Where is your sense of decency?" Gonsalves asked Meg Buckley and Pam Ketcham after they voted against the ordinance.

"Where is your sense of moral responsibility and concern?"

He said Mrs. Ketcham had promised in past months that she would vote to separate lots if certain criteria were established to determine which lots of the 440 originally involved would be eligible.

"Criteria were finally given and you dropped the ball. This is a political sham," Gonsalves stated. The councilman, who had been sitting in

(See Page 2, Column 1)



FATAL PLUNGE

A 76-year-old woman died Monday when she fell from the roof of this building, Park Towers, located at 700 Laurel Avenue in San Mateo.

12-story plunge fatal to woman in San Mateo

A 76-year-old woman plunged to her death Monday from the roof of the 12-story Park Towers, a senior citizen residence center in San Mateo.

The San Mateo County Coroner's Office identified the victim as Anna Stone, who lived at 638 San Antonio Road, Palo Alto. According to the coroner's report, the woman arrived at Park Towers shortly after 2 p.m. and inquired at the front desk about moving into the complex.

The woman reportedly invited to take a look at the complex, located at 700 Ave. She then apparently first on the concrete beam off the structure, according to the coroner's report.

There were no witnesses, the coroner's report said. The woman apparently landed first on the concrete beam tower. The coroner is conducting an investigation today.

SM Jones
March 13, 1979

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Belmont lots

(Continued From Page 1)

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And, it appeared that the council members are in disagreement over the conditions that would be attached to the blanket ordinance to separate all of the more than 40 lots involved.

Property owners who packed the council chambers cheered when

the audience to avoid a conflict of interest situation, then walked up to the council dais and prepared to vote, leaving his own property out in the cold.

The two councilwomen each claimed they favored separating lots, but Mrs. Ketcham wanted a six-month building moratorium attached to the ordinance. Mrs. Buckley wanted a blanket motion to separate all the lots involved and then establish new variances to control development on substandard lots.

She also wanted to establish a procedure by which developers on those substandard lots would contribute to a city fund to purchase property for open space.

Councilman William Hardwick would go only so far as an interim ordinance on building that would allow development by use permit.

When Gonsalves returned to the platform, though, the remainder of the council reached agreement on the blanket "unmerging" proposal and the councilman's vote wasn't needed, making his property eligible for separation.

City Planner Neal Martin again explained to the land holders that adjacent substandard lots were joined by state law in January 1977 if they were in the same ownership. In some 25 cases, more than 10 lots in single ownership were merged into one massive lot with the possibility of subdivision in the future.

Later that year, the state Legislature realized flaws in its law and

removed the merger mandate but by then, Belmont had already enforced the process. The city has been trying for months to come up with an ordinance, acceptable to a majority of the council, that would clear up the confusion.

Property owners who say they have lost thousands of dollars in property values through mergers have been trying to get their original parcel lines reinstated since then.

Earlier in the evening, the council had begun a public hearing to officially record some 100 merged lots it had discovered in recent months in areas outside of San Juan Canyon.

"I'm sorry I ever came to Belmont. You guys stink," angry property owner Angelo Fogliani told the council.

He, like many of the property owners, blamed the council for merged lots and subsequent lost property values.

Fogliani complained that a property owner next to him is able to build on an identical lot, apparently because that owner doesn't hold an adjacent lot. Fogliani called it discrimination.

"I'm going to go home tonight either happy or dead," he said while waiting for the council to decide on a separation ordinance.

Two attorneys representing clients with merged properties asked for the blanket unmerging ordinance.

"You have criteria now," Planning Commission Chairman Alex Fletcher said.

Belmont
50 Times 3/21

Angry Belmont mayor calls meet on letter charges

Belmont Mayor Walt Worthge has reacted angrily to a newsletter distributed by a homeowners association attacking recent actions of the City Council and three councilmen in particular.

Worthge has asked the city's homeowner association presidents to meet soon and discuss the contents of the newsletter.

"It is my personal feeling that comments as appear in this newsletter would more appropriately be distributed by any type of organization other than a homeowners association," Worthge wrote in a letter to the presidents.

Worthge said that to the best of his knowledge, such associations have bylaws specifically indicating that they are non-political.

"It would be my pleasure to appear at this meeting to discuss my further concerns with this type of blatant attack on members of this City Council," Worthge wrote.

The newsletter in question was distributed by the Cipriani Homeowners Association to its membership.

In it are two separate articles critical of Worthge and Councilmen Frank Gonsalves and Bill Hardwick.

In an article titled "City Council Corner," the unsigned author accuses the mayor of allowing a Feb. 13 council meeting to "degenerate into a barroom brawl between Frank Gonsalves and Pam Ketcham."

It claims that the pattern being set by the three councilmen "is indeed frightening to any thoughtful person."

In another article on the Citizens Advisory Committee, the writer claims that the three councilmen "have decided it is time for the council to take control of the CAC."

"This action by our council leads to only one conclusion: the three men on the council want members on committees and commissions who will tell them only what they want to hear and they want to hear it from their cronies," it continues.

John Stoddard, president of that association, was not available for comment today.

The bylaws of that association, however, state only that it is "an

independent organization, not affiliated with any other agency or any political parties. The association will make no donations nor sponsor any political candidates."

Worthge said he is not attempting to interfere with the seven associations in calling for a meeting.

"I was just bringing it to everybody's attention," Worthge said. It's up to the associations to react, if they choose to do so, he said.

The mayor, who is a former president of Central Homeowners Association, said this is the first time he has been aware of such a flagrantly political article appearing in an association newsletter.

"I can't sit by idly and do nothing," he added.

He said he wasn't sure if the council would discuss the issue at its meeting on Monday night.

One association president, Dallas Knudson of Central Homeowners, told the council and Stoddard in a letter this week that the newsletter attack on the three councilmen is "deplorable."

An attack on any council member, he added, is "out of line when you use your association as a springboard."

While the newsletter attacks the council for firing resident Mark Reeves from the General Plan Review Committee, Knudson said he doubts any employer would keep an employee who bad mouths his boss and takes him to court.

And, while the newsletter criticizes the council for doing away with "a truly independent CAC," Knudson countered that the CAC was meant to be an advisory group and wasn't supposed to function independently from the council.

Since the newsletter was written, the three councilmen have voted to abolish the committee.

Floyd Sampson, president of the Plateau-Skyline Association, said he does not want to see this issue on the agenda of the association presidents' meeting next week.

"We do not get ourselves involved with the internal affairs of another association," he said. However, he said he personally feels the newsletter was out of line.

James 3-27-79

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As the issue was debated, Councilwoman Pam Ketcham departed.

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"Every time we come here for redress, we end up with a City Council that does not exist. Everything that should be accomplished is being set aside."

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Worthge said he felt that an environmental impact report could drag the whole thing on for months. He thought there should be a moratorium on building on the lots while the council completed a general plan in July, while a negative declaration was accepted to speed things up, the councilman said.

This would allow people to sell their lots, he added.

After reconvening, the now all-male council group agreed to take testimony from landowners relative to legal complaints about the merging of their lots, lots, and finally continued the recording of complaints to April 12, at a special meeting.

The meeting, which ran four hours, opened on a much happier note.

This was a special commendation by the council given to Police Lt. James Scales.

Remarking on his "continued outstanding service to the city," the council congratulated him for outstanding and faithful service.

In particular, the council noted that through "professional" use of his hypnosis, Scales had provided the means to solve a rape-by-fraud case in January and the apprehending of two murder-rape suspects in Burlingame March 8.

He has given outstanding service as head of the detective bureau, the council declared.

Lot mergers uproar grows-

Redwood City (Ca.) Tribune

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councilwoman walks out

By Terry Robertson
Tribune Staff Writer

BELMONT — The lot mergers issue which has stirred the fury of council members and residents here and nearly caused chaos in two recent city council meetings, broke the meeting apart totally last night.

City Councilwoman Pamela Ketcham suddenly walked out of last night's council meeting in a huff over criticism from Councilman Frank Gonsalves and ended for another two weeks any attempt the council had to resolve the issue.

In walking out, Mrs. Ketcham prevented the angry verbal volleyball between the two opposing councilmembers that has highlighted two other recent council meetings. But in so doing, she also ended for the evening what may have been the beginning of a solution to the lot mergers issue that has plagued the city since January of 1977.

The issue concerns a state law that merged all

adjacent lots that were under one ownership if one or more of them was not developed and did not conform to zoning requirements. The law, in effect, prevents anyone whose lots fall under those criteria from building on the undeveloped lot or lots even though he or she may have been paying taxes on them. About 435 lots in Belmont were affected.

The council has spent most of its time in the past two months grappling with a way to please angry residents by unmerging their lots and, at the same time finding a way to use the unwanted law as a growth control tool.

Round three of the Gonsalves-Ketcham fray came after Mayor Walter Worthge proposed a plan to unmerge 95 of those lots, but put a four-month building moratorium on the undeveloped, unmerged lots. The proposal would theoretically pacify the angry residents and give the council a chance to develop criteria for the unmerging of

the other 395 lots that were affected by the law, he said.

It also would allow time for the council to get a better grasp on the city's growth plans by expediting the completion of the city's general plan expected by July.

The intent last night was simply to ask City Attorney Kenneth Dickerson to report back to the council in two weeks on whether a selective moratorium was legal or whether the council would have to put a blanket moratorium on all residential building in the city.

After some minutes of discussion on the proposal, Mrs. Ketcham, who said she favors a citywide building moratorium, but could go along with the selective one, was in the middle of telling the council she wanted a special study session before taking any kind of action.

Councilman Frank Gonsalves, whose two merged lots and a conflict-of-interest law have

prevented him from taking part in the volatile issue, stood up from his seat in the audience to address the council much in the same way he has done prior to the other squabbles with Mrs. Ketcham.

"Here we go again," Mrs. Ketcham was overheard to say.

"I have lost count of the number of study sessions the council has had on this issue," an angry Gonsalves said. "I don't think a study session could help her (Mrs. Ketcham) make up her mind. You could have study sessions until you're blue in the face and it wouldn't do any good."

At that point Mrs. Ketcham quietly got up from her seat and headed for the exit.

Mayor Worthge asked her if she was leaving and she replied:

"I said before, if he is going to speak and accuse me, I'll leave."

That she did and never returned.