

Belmont bans 'junk guns' sales

GUN CONTROL

Law passes as county supervisors start debate

BY BRENDA JORDAN
Staff Reporter

The Belmont City Council recently approved an ordinance banning the local sale of "Saturday Night Specials," also known as "junk guns."

Violation of the ordinance would constitute a misdemeanor.

Junk guns are generally classified as short-barreled handguns that are poorly

constructed and not suitable for sporting purposes.

They were banned from importation to the United States in 1968 but are still widely available from California manufacturers.

They often sell for about \$25 and are three times as likely to be used in crimes as other guns.

"I'm not a gun person," Councilwoman Adele Della Santina said about the ordinance. "Hunting guns are for hunting, but these guns - what are they for?"

"A lot of criminal acts are committed with these types of guns," Belmont Chief of Police James Goulart said. "They're a lot cheaper and easier to obtain.

"I've seen people get hurt by these," he

continued. "The barrel explodes on them. They're not equipped to handle today's ammunition."

The ordinance also calls for the chief of police to publish and provide a list of Saturday Night Specials, to be updated semi-annually.

"It is a preventive measure," Santina said. "We may not have a problem here in Belmont and we don't want one either."

There are no gun retailers in Belmont.

Two community residents spoke against the measure.

Belmont resident Jess Jones said he felt the wording of the ordinance was not clear enough to become a valid law.

"It's too ambiguous," he told the council. "I'm a gun collector and I can't under-

stand it. You could be sued if somebody is brought up on charges (for selling a junk gun)."

Chief Goulart agreed that the wording could have been better.

"The concept is good but I don't understand some of the language in the ordinance," he said. "I'd have to have an officer who knew guns better than I to explain it."

Bob McAdams, a concerned Belmont resident, also spoke against the ordinance.

"West Hollywood approved such an ordinance but they're holding off implementing it because of a lawsuit questioning its legality," he said.

See **JUNK GUNS**, page 13A

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McAdams said that gun regulation is the jurisdiction of the state government and he quoted a June 19 letter from the office of the Attorney General Daniel Lungren stating that California has done such a thorough job regulating sale of firearms that local legislation is not needed.

"It seems like we have too many laws already," McAdams said. "I don't want to see criminals with guns, but the city of

Belmont shouldn't be using tax money to undermine state law."

Santina said she listened to the residents' concerns but didn't find substantial reason to vote against the ordinance.

The Belmont junk gun ordinance was initiated after receiving a letter from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) requesting that Bay Area cities adopt local ordinances. On May 30, mayors of 20 East Bay cities met to discuss the issue.

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors is currently considering a county-wide ban and will vote on the matter at their Aug. 20 meeting.

"With 15 gun dealerships in the County, the ordinance is going to have an impact," Supervisor Mike Nevin said. "Jurisdiction is always questioned in these sorts of things but I'm confident that we do have the jurisdiction and the ordinance will be valid."

Downtown Belmont — Now You See It, or Maybe You Don't

Belmont doesn't have a downtown.

Belmont doesn't want a downtown.

City officials agree — Belmont doesn't want a downtown.

It's a matter of some history and some geography and, simply, that this is how people in Belmont want it to be.

Yes, there is the Carlmont Village Shopping Center at the corner of Ralston Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas.

PENINSULA DOWNTOWNS

A weekly series on the heart and the soul of our downtowns.

Yes, there is a small commercial area on Ralston Avenue, east of Sixth Avenue.

And yes, a four-block area south of Ralston, along El Camino Real, includes a new City Hall and a new Safeway, and the area is slated for considerable redevelopment.

But even that is not a downtown, by golly.

A citywide survey in January asked residents to rank the activities the city government ought to engage in. Commercial revitalization ranked among the lowest, said City Manager **Damon Edwards**.

"We're the largest city on the Peninsula without a downtown," Edwards said. "The attitude is, 'Leave it alone. It's fine.'"

A LITTLE HISTORY: Belmont became a city in 1926, later than most of the cities on the Peninsula.

Before then, it was composed of the large summer estates of wealthy San Francisco families, who came to the area by train, usually stopping in downtown San Mateo and proceeding by car-

riage, or whatever, to neighboring Belmont.

That means that Belmont, unlike most of the other Peninsula cities, developed without a main train station and without the central, commercial neighborhood that grew out of a train station.

According to local legend, Belmont only incorporated to prevent annexation by San Carlos, said to be covetously eyeing the potential property tax revenues of the homes and estates in the hills.

But even after Belmont became a city, its geography really inhibited the development of a central commercial neighborhood.

Belmont's 26,000 residents live in a total of 4.5 square miles, and it's possible that all but the half square mile is on a hill.

The hills on the western portion of towns such as San Carlos, Redwood City and San Mateo make up almost the entirety of Belmont.

Heading east on Ralston, the hills end abruptly at South Road, and there's a relatively flat section of land before Ralston connects to El Camino and the figurative, if not literal, edge of the city.

That flat portion of Ralston includes a strip of shops and small stores less than 1,000 feet long.

"There's just very little flat land in Belmont," said Edwards.

IN THE WORKS: The city is working on what flat land there is.

The four blocks south of Ralston are a focal point of considerable activity.

Safeway is building a 42,000 square-foot store that's near the new City Hall building, which will be occupied by the police de-

partment once the City Council decides what to do with the old police department building.

The Safeway building will have a quasi-Victorian look, and a clock tower that has all the potential of becoming a city landmark.

A block north of that, the city has acquired three-fourths of an acre and is preparing to invite developers to bid on what is expected to be a \$2.5 million retail construction project.

The final proposal description is ready, although the City Council must choose between one large retail store or several smaller shops and stores.

The parcel will be anchored by the historic blue Emmett House, vintage 1885, at the corner Ralston and El Camino.

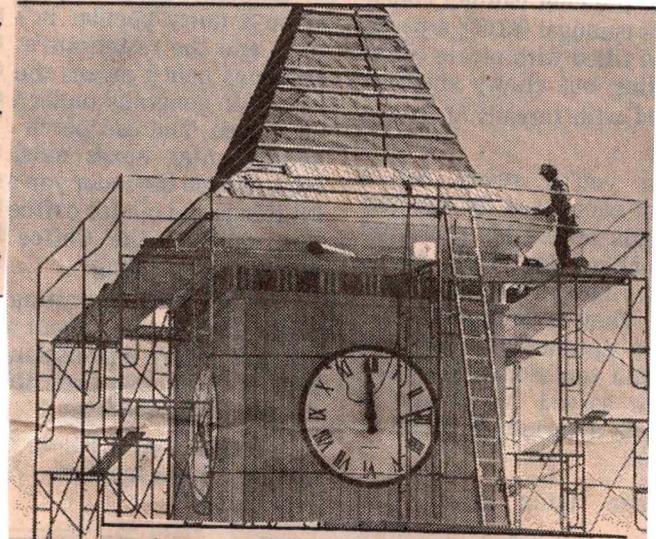
A block south of Safeway is 12,000 square feet of retail property that is being privately developed. Preliminary agreements call for tenants to include Noah's Bagels, a Boston Market restaurant, a camera shop and a dry cleaners.

A block south is the old City Hall, built in the 1950s to resemble a public school.

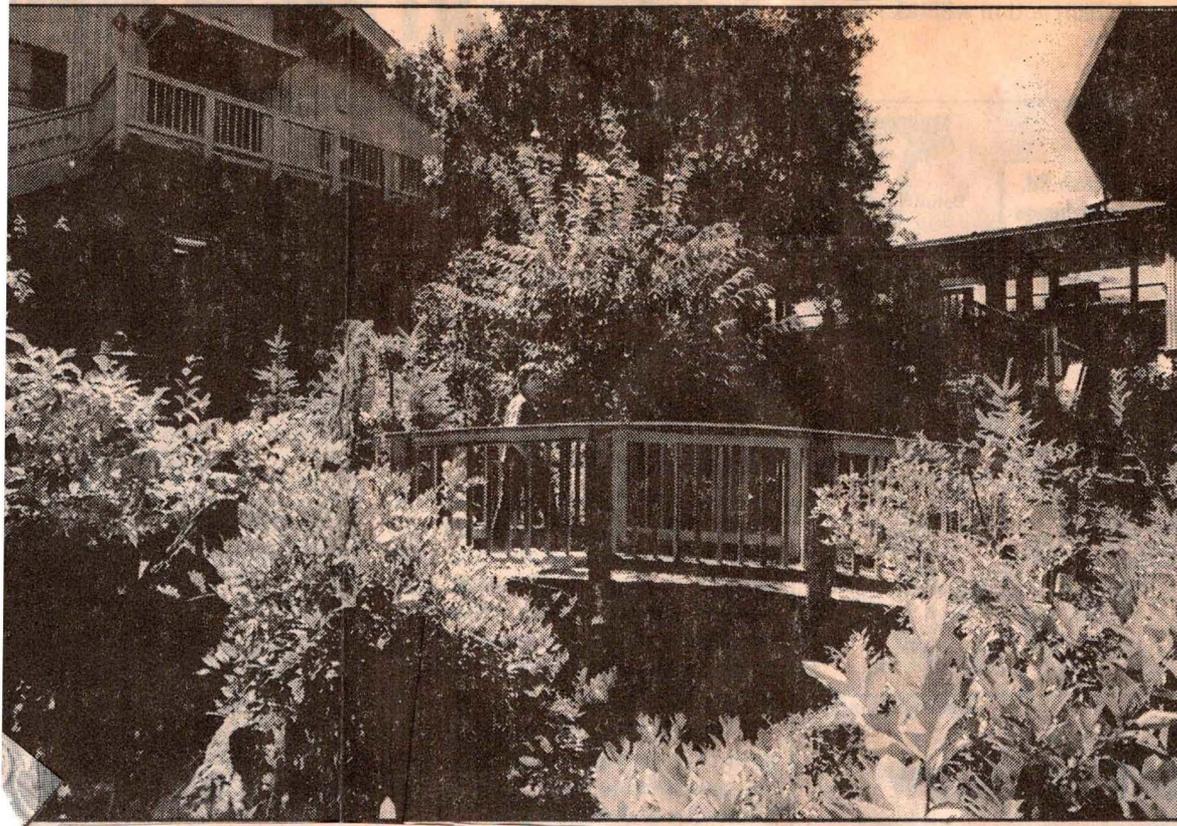
The old City Hall is going to be torn down, and the city's redevelopment agency is going to build six homes to be sold below the median market value.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS: Ironically,

SF Chronicle
Friday
Sept 6,
1991
copy also in Belmont Business



Work on the Safeway store and clocktower



A pleasant nursery garden lies at the heart of the Carlmont Village Shopping Center

'If we have to assign ourselves a description, we'll take Atherton or Hillsborough'

— NANCY LEAVITT,
BELMONT CITY COUNCIL

ed — the quintessential convenience center for the easy living of Belmont.

Across the street is a Catholic church. At another corner is a Safeway and a Greek Orthodox church. At the final corner is another small series of shops and Vivace, Belmont's popular Italian restaurant.

Stand in the middle of Carlmont Village and look north, and you'll see hills on either hand. Streets twist and wind their way up and down the hills and homes are tucked in among the trees and shrubs.

In another time and place, the four corners would include city hall and the courthouse and in the middle would be a common green with a Civil War statue.

"This is where everybody gathers," said Leavitt. "But it's not a downtown. It's part of a neighborhood."

Belmont's life is as self-contained as it wants to be.

More and more, people who live there might also work nearby, as growth on the bayside continues.

But Belmont, as Leavitt said, is a bedroom community. It's where people make their home — on hills with some of the most spectacular views of San Francisco Bay.

That's where the emphasis has been. And that's where it will stay.

there is more interest than ever in commercial development in Belmont — from businesses and developers outside the city.

The explosive growth at Redwood Shores, just to the east of Belmont, has been duplicated in Belmont's long-dormant land east of Bayshore.

There, Oral B and Nikon have well-established operations, Redwood City's Autobahn Motors is about to open a massive new facility, Kaufman & Broad is building more than 50 small homes and Oracle has promised that its next wave of growth will lap over into Belmont.

All that's fine for the city's financial footing — in the last five years, its 15-year-old redevelopment district has come into its own, generating more than \$2 million per year after a decade of near-dormancy.

And if the growth along the bayside encourages commercial growth, that's fine, too.

But keep it small, and remember that Belmont is interested in serving its residents, not becoming one of the Peninsula boutique downtowns where people come from miles around to sit on the sidewalks and eat over-priced endive salads.

"We want to serve our people, not draw shoppers," said City Councilwoman Nancy Leavitt.

"You need a place where you

can get things done and don't have to get on the freeway," Leavitt said. "But if we're going to do any shopping, we want to do it somewhere else."

A VILLAGE, NOT A CITY: If you're looking for a traditional downtown, look somewhere other than Belmont.

If you're looking for Belmont, look at the Carlmont Village Shopping Center.

Once land belonging to a military academy, the bulk of the center was a parade ground.

Now, it's a low-profile series of shops and stores, nestled among towering trees. The buildings are uniformly painted earth tones of deep beige and dark green.

On a weekday morning, a stroll along the sidewalks of the center means seeing people cozily enjoying a cup of coffee at the outdoor tables at Starbucks.

The centerpiece of the place might be the landmark Pine Brook Inn, a well-established restaurant with a creek running through it.

Lunardi's Market anchors the southern end of the center, providing a touch of up-scale grocery shopping cachet.

There's a bank and a video store and a pizza place. There's a Chinese restaurant and a coin-operated car wash and a gift shop.

It's complete and self-contained.

Belmont's Tough Take on Truants

Kids caught on street soon could face whopping fines

By John Wildermuth
Chronicle Peninsula Bureau

Students who cut class or skip school could find themselves forking out big bucks for that afternoon at the beach under a new anti-truancy ordinance under study in Belmont.

The proposed ordinance, slated to go to the City Council for approval this month, allows police to stop juveniles on the street during the school day and give them a ticket that could end up costing as much as \$400.

"The bottom line is we're trying to make it harder for kids to stay out on the streets," said Bob Hunter, a vice principal at Belmont's Carlmont High School. "As many as 25 to 30 percent of the students who start

school with the freshman class don't finish, and truancy is a major part of that problem."

Hunter estimated that as many as 12 percent of the students who show up at Carlmont each day skip one or more classes. That number doesn't include teenagers who have stopped coming to school entirely.

Truancy and class-cutting are continuing problems at schools everywhere, but because of tight school finances and concerns about legal issues, there are fewer and fewer ways to deal with these problems, Hunter said.

At Carlmont, the inspiration for the recent hit

TRUANTS: Page A14 Col. 3

TRUANTS: Belmont Considers Imposing Stiff

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movie "Dangerous Minds," the attendance policy in the mid-1980s called for students to receive a warning after five unexcused absences and allowed them to be dropped from class if they missed 10 sessions.

But some parents sued, complaining that students were in effect being expelled for poor attendance. The suit was settled out of court in 1991 after the district agreed to drop that policy.

"Since that time, there haven't been a lot of penalties for truancy," Hunter said.

In the past couple of years, however, some larger districts in the state have made an all-out effort to get pupils back into class, even if that means involving the police and the juvenile courts.

Having young people roaming the streets in the middle of the day can lead to crime, but more importantly, if students are going to learn, they have to be in school, said Belmont Police Chief Jim Goulart.

"With this ordinance, students will learn they have a choice to make," he said. "Either they go to school, or they get a citation."

The original plan called for fines from \$100 to \$500. But the city decided to lower the fines because of costs associated with them — costs families would have to bear. State and local assessments on Juvenile Court fines boost the cost of tickets by about \$17 for every \$10 of the fine, so a \$100 fine would end up costing as much as \$270.

The penalties now are slated to be \$35 for a first offense, \$75 for the second, and \$150 for a third conviction.

"With the assessments, it works out to about the same cost as before," Goulart said. "We don't want to make the cost of the tickets so prohibitive that officers

won't issue them."

While a number of Southern California school districts, including Los Angeles, San Diego and Monrovia, have similar programs, all educators aren't convinced that hard-line tactics are the best way to deal with youths who skip school.

A similar anti-truancy program has been discussed in San Francisco, but Superintendent Bill Rojas is not ready to sign on just yet.

"The best way of getting stu-

dents into their seats is by providing exciting, relevant programs where kids are turned on and want to be in school," said Gail Kaufman, a spokeswoman for the district. "We would rather take a more positive approach to dealing with the problem."

But for an increasing number

of cities, anti-truancy ordinances designed to put teenagers in school during the day fit comfortably with new curfew laws designed to keep young people off the streets late at night. While Belmont's planned ordinance may be the first in the Bay Area, it's not likely to be the last, said Goulart.

Council debates downtown

BY BRENDA JORDAN
Staff Reporter

A recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle, in which the mayor and city manager of Belmont were quoted on their ideas about what Belmont's downtown should look like, sparked a debate among council members at the Sept. 10 meeting.

The article published Sept. 6 began: "Belmont doesn't have a downtown. Belmont doesn't want a downtown. City officials agree - Belmont doesn't want a downtown."

Councilwoman Coralin Feierbach had a serious problem with that last line.

"Well, I do want a downtown," Feierbach stated emphatically Tuesday night.

She said she also felt that Mayor Nancy Levitt's comments in the article implied that Belmont did not want to attract outside shoppers to Belmont.

"Come on, who's going to go to all these big stores (Safeway, new Mercedes dealership)?" Feierbach explained in a telephone interview after the meeting. "Belmont can never be like Hillsborough or Woodside. It's too late. We have a canvas downtown already. We need to develop a small village version of downtown Palo Alto."

The article had quoted Levitt as saying: "If we have to assign ourselves a description, we'll take Atherton or Hillsborough."

Councilwoman Pamela Rianda was also upset that the Chronicle article made it sound like the entire council was in agreement with the ideas expressed.

"It doesn't reflect the attitudes of all council members," she said. "We need to bring business into downtown. We want to attract shoppers. Downtown development would give a center to our city, a central location, an identity."

Rianda said it is still the city's policy to develop a downtown area.

"A few years ago, we embarked on a project to design a down-

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town as a central location where people could gather," she said. "For years it was 'Where is downtown?' It was the butt of many jokes."

Another point of contention about the article was that Belmont does not have a traditional downtown.

"We are a traditional downtown; to portray us as anything else is wrong," said Rianda. "We have banks, bakeries, grocery stores, churches. We have everything a traditional downtown has."

The article also quoted City Manager Damon Edwards as saying that commercial revital-

ization did not rank very high in importance on a city-wide survey of residents in January.

Feierbach countered, "Just because it was one of the last things they wanted doesn't mean they didn't want it."

Downtown projects

At present, there are numerous works in progress aimed at creating a downtown-like atmosphere in Belmont.

The new 42,000-square-foot Safeway, to be opened by Thanksgiving, seems to be the focal point.

A three-fourths-acre plot of land a block north of the new Safeway plaza, recently ac-

quired by the city, is to be redeveloped reportedly for retail use. And a block south of Safeway is a 12,000-square-foot area to be privately developed as retail property. Noah's Bagels and Boston Market reportedly have preliminary agreements to open stores there.

In addition, Redwood City's Autobahn Motors will be building a new Mercedes complex east of Highway 101. Oracle Corporation is also drawing plans for a major expansion east of the highway.

Phone calls to Belmont Planning Director Dan Vanderprien for details on these projects were not returned.

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OPEN FORUM

Pam Rianda & Coralin Feierbach

The Future of Belmont's Downtown Is a Live Issue

Editor — Contrary to your Peninsula Insider column "Downtown Belmont — Now You See it, Now You Don't" (Peninsula Friday, September 6), all city officials do not agree that Belmont doesn't want a downtown.

We believe that Belmont does want a downtown, and we have been planning and designing it for at least the last eight years.

Although it may be true that Belmont's downtown is small compared to other downtown shopping districts, what we lack in size we make up for in quality.

At this point, we already have a traditional downtown: banking services, bakery, florist, pharmacy, casual dining and formal dining, hair care for men and women, automotive care and other professional services.

What we hope to do is expand and define our existing downtown with similar small businesses. We have never discussed large, regional retail stores.

Mayor Nancy Levitt was quoted in the article as saying: "We want to serve our people, not draw shoppers."

We believe the opposite must prevail. Downtown Belmont will be a comfortable place for all to come and enjoy a quiet cup of coffee and to explore the small, friendly business atmosphere that will serve the needs of

today and tomorrow's customers.

Mayor Levitt also commented: "But if we are going to do any shopping, we want to do it somewhere else."

We don't feel this statement is supportive of our fine business community.

People continually request financial and other kinds of help from our merchants — rarely are they turned down.

The business community is always there to assist the residential community of Belmont. They deserve our continued support.

Mayor Levitt is also quoted as saying: "If we have to assign ourselves a description, we'll take Atherton or Hillsborough." Belmont is not, and will never be, either one of these fine cities.

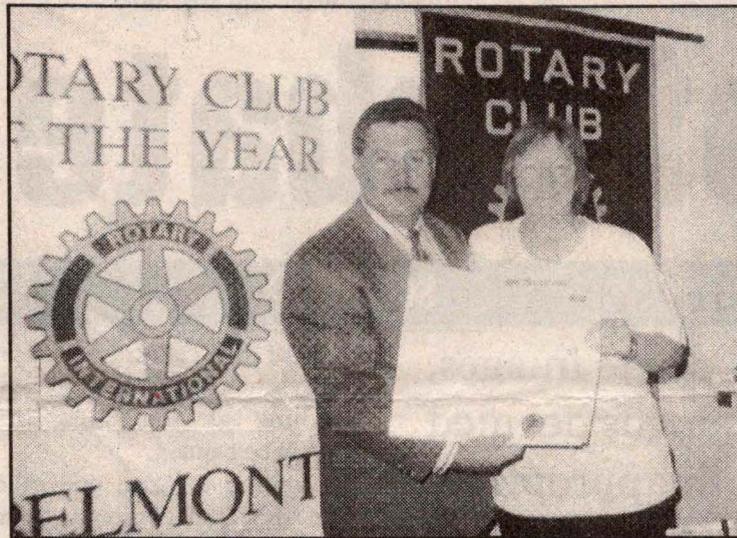
Years ago, Belmont chose a direction for its planning and development different from those two cities — a mix of residential and business uses.

Because of this, we continue to strive to reach a balanced relationship between the residential and the business community, and to create the best of both.

Pam Rianda and Coralin Feierbach are members of the Belmont City Council.

Engineer Bulletin
Sept 1996

Rotary honor



SPECIAL TO THE EB

Recognition: Belmont Mayor Nancy Levitt presented past Rotary President Tom Diridon with a proclamation for his work in obtaining for the club the honor of Club of the Year and for his continued efforts with Belmont seniors, grants and scholarships, youth activities and a high level of Paul Harris Fellows.