

BELMONT CITY
GOVERNMENT
(GENERAL)
JAN. + FEB. 1980

'Big Al' could be rubbed out

"Big Al" Capone is not a suitable decoration for downtown Belmont. Planning Commissioner Alex Fletcher told his colleagues Monday night.

He was referring to a character appearing on a proposed sign for a new business selling "Chicago-style" pizza and ribs.

"I just don't like the characterization for our main street," Fletcher said.

So restaurant owner Arthur Ruda suggested, on the basis of a previous meeting with the Design Committee, that Al be "softened up" a bit.

The commission will decide at a later meeting whether Ruda's "dopey gangster" is appropriate for downtown Belmont.

Options remain open for Belmont planners

By Laura Ost
Times Tribune Staff

BELMONT — Faced with too many options, the Planning Commission Monday night grappled with the methodology rather than the specifics of a voter-approved limit on building.

Two systems for allocating the 56 permits allowed annually in Belmont had been proposed. The commission must recommend to the City Council by Jan. 22 one of the systems or a combination of the two.

At the end of a two-hour public hearing and discussion, the commission had at least decided on an evaluation method. Chairman Donald Heiman said he would type up his point-by-point reaction to both systems, and that the com-

mission could work from that at a 9 a.m. meeting Saturday, Jan. 12.

The commission also tentatively agreed that permit applications for 1980 should be accepted starting immediately after the council adopts a system, and those for 1981 should be accepted beginning in July.

Comparison was difficult because the systems are substantially different in form as well as content. One system, proposed by Citizens Initiative for Orderly Growth, is highly mathematical and subtracts or awards points "based on the relationship of a property and project to the city as a whole," according to Heiman. The other, prepared by Martin Carpenter Associates, including City Planner Malcolm Carpenter, which awards points on simple yes/no criteria, is an "analy-

sis of the piece of property itself," Heiman said.

One difference between the two plans, pointed out during the public hearing, is that COG does not call for a set ratio of single to multi-family units, as the Martin plan does.

Public opinion seemed balanced on specifics of the two systems, and the commissioners, who were more interested in absorbing information than expressing opinion, seemed headed for a compromise plan. It was suggested several times that a number of recently-awarded permits be test-run through each system.

Commissioner Joe Green said he was disappointed there had been so little public input — fewer than 10 members of the community have commented on the proposals. The public hearing will be reopened at a later meeting.

Belmont may seek third opinion on

FEB 6 1980

how to get computer to work

By Terry Robertson
Times Tribune Staff

BELMONT — The fate of City Hall's beleaguered computer budget system, still waiting to be switched on after 2½ years of scandal and ineptitude by two outside consultants, soon may be decided by a third expert.

A recommendation has been made to the City Council to allow Finance Director John Bramble to hire the consultant whose job it will be to decide what, if anything, needs to be done to get the computer system in service.

The city's Finance Commission

made the recommendation last week after agreeing that Richard Perry, the city's second computer consultant since the city embarked on the computer program in July 1977, was getting nothing done.

A \$5,000 ceiling has been placed on the proposed consultant's salary.

Bramble said if the council gives its approval, the consultant will be asked to advise the city how the system should be implemented or whether it should be scrapped and the computer hardware sold.

The recommendation will be considered by the council at a special meeting Feb. 13.

The city is losing about \$35,000 a year and has already lost about \$109,000 since 1977 because the computer is sitting idle, Bramble said.

Michael Perry and Associates was hired a year ago for \$1 to reprogram the system after the first consultant bilked the city in a fraud and forgery scheme.

"One of the reasons for (the commission's recommendation) is that Perry has been extremely and exceedingly slow to the point that he has accomplished nothing," Bramble said. "Essentially, we have had the computer 2½ years and we're pretty much in the same place as

when we hired him."

He noted that Perry's contract still has five months to run, but it is unlikely that the Las Vegas-based consultant will be able to complete his work in that time.

Bramble put part of the blame on the City Council for not taking Perry's first offer to reprogram the system in a year for \$25,000. Instead, the gun-shy City Council, still reeling from the fraud and forgery scheme perpetrated by Richard Grimm, the first consultant, chose Perry's second offer, which gave him 18 months to do the work at the \$1 salary.

"Frankly, the city nickled and

dined itself to death," Bramble said.

He said he didn't believe it would be unwise for the city to hire a third consultant, considering the city's luck with the first two.

"First, who was to know that Grimm was going to be a crook and that he'd pick Belmont?" he asked. "It was an unfortunate situation."

(Grimm was convicted more than a year ago for forging about \$89,000 in city checks and perpetrating a contract fraud with the city.)

Second, Bramble added, the \$1 contract does not give the city much leverage in forcing Perry to

complete his work.

The Finance Commission initially recommended that Perry and Associates be let go when his contract expires, but the recommendation was later modified to give the city the option to renew Perry's contract, according to commission Chairman John Nelson.

But, he added, "the man from Las Vegas is certainly in a bit of hot water."

The city bought the computer hardware for about \$86,000 in a cost-saving venture in mid-1977 from G & L Systems Inc. through United States Leasing.

BELMONT CITY
GOVERNMENT
(GENERAL)
MAR. & MAY 1980

San Carlos gets tough with state

City wants traffic signal
after a year of waiting

By Terry Robertson
Times Tribune Staff

BELMONT — The city is expected to get tough this week with the state Department of Transportation (CalTrans) over a traffic signal that city officials have been trying for a year to obtain.

The signal is at El Camino Real and Davey Glen Avenue.

A traffic consultant will be hired by the City Council Tuesday night to put together information proving the intersection needs the light.

"We're just not high on the state's priority list," Councilman William Hardwick said this morning. "A lot of times they won't put one in until there have been some accidents or someone has been killed."

The city has been trying to get the state to pay for at least a share of a three-way traffic signal — expected to cost \$80,000 — since El Camino Real is a state highway.

"I'm not sure we can afford the cost of the whole signal," Hardwick said.

The intersection has been a concern for the city since the construction of a small shopping center and a 400-unit condominium and apartment complex at the north-Belmont intersection last year.

Hardwick said he wasn't certain how much the consultant would cost, but that it was important that the signal be put in before a major accident happens there.

"We felt we needed one for a long time," he said. "I think, too, that the (store merchants at Davey Glen Shopping Center) felt they were going to get one before this."

"I think they were concerned how the traffic impact would affect their business."

The shopping center's developers indicated at the time that if the plans for the center were approved, they would be willing to pay for part of the signal. It was not immediately known how much money they would be willing to pay, however.

Added SP commuter parking to await CalTrans takeover

By Terry Robertson
Times Tribune Staff

BELMONT — The city's request for a larger commuter parking lot on El Camino Real was put on hold Monday until Southern Pacific Co. and the California Department of Transportation reach an agreement on continuing the railroad's Peninsula commute train service.

Negotiations on CalTrans subsidizing the SP commuter train operation and making CalTrans a prime voice in commute service between San Francisco and San Jose, are nearing completion, according to Jerry Pera, SP commuter service manager.

Contract negotiations call for SP to hand over the service exactly as it was in 1977.

"We therefore hesitate to make any changes in the service which may prejudice their future plans," Pera told City Manager James De-

Chaine in a letter received March 17.

"This may work to our advantage," DeChaine said Wednesday. "CalTrans is a public agency and is eligible for federal grants. SP is private and is not."

"CalTrans will be better able financially to expand the parking lot."

DeChaine asked SP in late February to extend its parking lot north on El Camino Real by 75 spaces because an increasing number of commuters were spilling into the city's business district, parking in merchant's lots and on the city's streets.

The downtown area already is suffering from a lack of adequate parking, he said.

DeChaine suggested that the 117-space SP lot, located just north of Ralston Avenue, be extended to accommodate about 75 additional cars.

JUL 15 1980

Five(Belmont) companies suing city

By John Raess
Times Tribune staff

REDWOOD CITY — Five Belmont companies have filed suit against the city, claiming damages from traffic barricades erected on Belmont streets over the past two years.

The five firms, represented by San Mateo attorney William Turner, contend their businesses have suffered since neighboring streets were closed to through traffic.

The companies are asking for damages, including the fair market price of their property, taxes, insurance, interest and legal fees.

They are also asking \$100,000 apiece in punitive damages from the city.

All five — H. L. Heggstad Company, Howard Jones Batteries, Nicolai Supply Company, Raker Roofing and Laughlin and Bliss — have offices on O'Neill Street. The entire area is known as the Harbor Industrial Area.

Because of the barriers, O'Neill, a two-lane street, can be entered and exited only from its west end where it crosses Old County Road.

The companies complain that the barriers have virtually converted O'Neill into a cul-de-sac, one-third of a mile long, with barely enough room for a car to turn around in.

Furthermore, the firms contend, the barriers deny easy access to delivery trucks and force employees to circle the entire Homeview subdivision by traveling down Old County Road, a busy thoroughfare, to Ralston Avenue to Highway 101.

The barriers also delay emergen-

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cy vehicles from getting to the businesses because of the roundabout route they have to take and the increased length of time it takes to remove the locks on the barriers.

Homeview residents have maintained that the barriers keep their neighborhood free from excess traffic and noise and air pollution.

After a city traffic study showed that an average of 4,000 cars traveled daily back and forth on Hiller and Elmer streets alone, the first metal traffic barrier was built on Elmer Street in July of 1978.

The city added barricades in August of 1979 at Hiller, Elmer, Furlong, Granada, Irwin, Judson and Kedith streets.

Responding to the battle between the businesses and the residents, the City Council voted unanimously on Feb. 13 to keep the barriers intact.

Turner argued then that the poor access the barriers result in lowered property values for the businesses and is tantamount to a violation by the city of their civil rights.

CITY OF BELMONT
GOVERNMENT
(GENERAL)
DEC. 1980

11 stores sue Belmont for damages from floods

By John Raess
Times Tribune staff

DEC 3 1980

Eleven stores in the Carlmont Shopping Center have filed suit against the city of Belmont for flood damages resulting from the collapse of the city's storm drain during heavy rains early this year.

It is the third lawsuit filed in the past two months demanding damages from flooding caused by the failure of the drainage system.

Damage claims from the flood are estimated at well over \$1 million.

The suits stem from a flash flood that swept over the shopping center at the corner of Ralston Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas Feb. 19.

Earlier, record rainfall caused the collapse of 400 feet of drainage pipe from the pressure of water backup in the system.

The suit was filed by attorney John Grathwohl in San Mateo County Superior Court.

In May the city rejected claims totaling about \$100,000 from stores at the center.

The claims ranged from \$225 for damage to a pharmacy at the center to more than \$27,000 in damages to a hardware store.

The city's southern drainage system runs beneath the shopping center toward San Francisco Bay.

Sixty percent of the city's storm drainage runs through the pipes that were damaged, according to city officials.

City Manager James DeChaine said last month that the storm drainage system antedated the city's 1926 incorporation.

The collapsed pipes created a gaping hole 50 feet by 80 feet on the grounds of the Belmont Hills Psychiatric Center, 1301 Ralston Ave.

Three weeks ago, the hospital filed suit for nearly \$1 million in damages it claimed resulted from the same flood that hit the shopping center.

Among other damages, the hospital claimed \$200,000 for the destruction of its recreation center and \$200,000 in damages to a caved-in parking lot.

The flood forced the evacuation of most of the hospital's patients for two days while citizen volunteers and hospital employees cleaned the buildings.

Five property owners also filed suit in October for damages resulting from the flood.

Their claims also totaled more than \$100,000.

City officials have claimed the drain's collapse is an "act of God" that will relieve the city of liability.

One month after the flood, a consultant's report indicated that the city's drainage system was inadequate and suggested a \$7.7 million overhaul.

The city is self-insured to \$100,000 and is covered for amounts over that by a joint insurance pool with other cities.

CITY GOVERNMENT
(GENERAL)
DEC. 1980

Belmont's dreams became reality in 1980

By Terry Robertson
Times Tribune Staff

DEC 1 1980

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BELMONT — It was a year when dreams began to become reality.

A system to limit new housing starts was implemented. Architects were hired to draw up plans to expand the library and a multi-use playing field. A much-maligned city computer was finally plugged in. And initial plans for development of a downtown center were beginning to surface.

And as those pieces were falling into place, three new members were elected to a strife-torn City Council, who in turn appointed the city's first female mayor. Together they vowed to work on city problems only, staying away from each others' throats.

It's a vow which has been kept.

"This is a year where we've seen some potential projects be realized," said Mayor Margaret Buckley.

As 1980 began, the city's voters had just passed a measure which would slow housing starts to 56 a year. It was up to the city to figure out how. With the help of its staff and a citizens group, a priority point system was worked out by March and is currently under way.

Library expansion has been an eight-year dream for some. It finally got under way when the county came up with funds to hire an architect to design the expansion. The same was done for development of a playing field complex near Marine World Parkway. It will take years for the field actually to be built.

It seemed like a good way to save money when the city decided in 1977 to develop a computer system to keep the payroll.

Well, the computer technician walked off with more than \$60,000 in city funds, and delays in getting a new consultant and the software needed to begin the project almost killed the idea first.

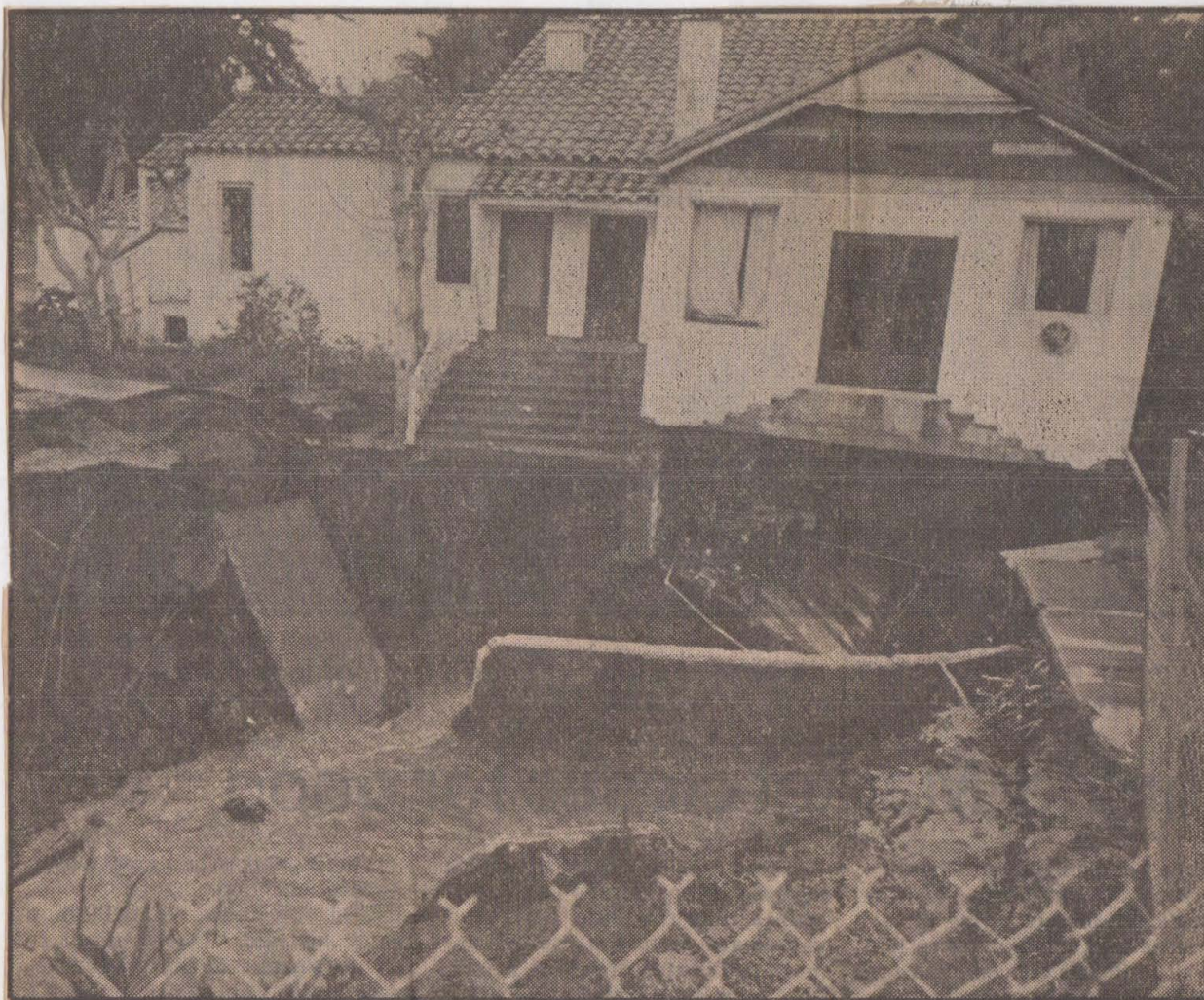
The problems were worked out and the now the city may begin saving money.

But the city was not without its troubles. January and February storms created a major flooding problem in many areas of the city.

In March, the Willsey-Hamm report showed that renovation of the citywide drainage system would cost \$7.5 million — an sum by far out of reach for a city of its size.

"Hopefully, we'll find a solution to the problem in 1981," said Buckley. "We'll have to find funding on the state or federal level."

OVER



Times Tribune staff photo by Bob Andres

One of the few problems Belmont encountered this year was the damage the winter's rain storms caused. In February the ground caved in around the Belmont Hills Psychiatric Center, which has since sued the city.

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