

CITY OF BELMONT
THE INDEPENDENT
MARCH 9, 2002

Warden gives city rave review

State of City address focuses on goals for 2002

By Wes Bowers
Staff Reporter

BELMONT — The city is in good shape, establishing respect and charting a healthy future, despite the fact it may have to cut \$500,000 from its budget later this year, according to Mayor Dave Warden.

Last week Warden gave his State of the City address in the form of his "Infamous Top Ten List," laying out his priorities over the next year.

First and foremost for the city, he said, was to restore trust and respect, something he vowed to do when he was selected as mayor last November.

"I think we have restored it," he said. "The council gets along with the staff and the public, and the staff gets along with the public. I think that's the first time in 30 years it's ever happened here."

One of the major things Belmont needs to do is develop a vision, according to Warden. "We're a suburban village," he said. "We have trees, open space and wildlife. Some communities don't have that. We have a wonderful university right in the middle of town and most people don't even know it's there. We have a sports complex, a lake, miles of hiking trails, a wonderful ice skating facility and senior center."

Other things that Warden said need to be done — and that will be done this year — include: obtaining funding for the new library; breaking ground on Fire Station 14; implementing a performance-

based budget program for the city; spending \$7 million in Redevelopment Agency funds and deciding what to do about the new police station.

"We're going to figure out what to do with the police station and City Hall," he said. "The [police] building they're in now is old and needs to go. The roof is covered in plastic and it's just pathetic. Our officers have begged us for a new building and we really need one."

Warden noted that while building a new facility is desperately needed, the cost for the project and how to fund it is still unknown.

"We can build a big station or a small emergency services building," he said. "But right now we don't know which one is better, and we don't know where we're going to get money from, how much it will cost or what it will do to the parking situation. It's all up in the air at this point."

Warden also wants to develop a renovation plan for the city's athletic fields, and continues to look at preserving open space in Belmont.

"We have fields with drainage problems and wear-and-tear," he said. "Many of them are covered with gopher holes, and a kid could trip out there and sprain an ankle. We need to irrigate, re-turf and, where we can, possibly put in drinking fountains and benches."

Warden said the city also needs to improve traffic flow by enforcing strict measures like traffic circles, speed bumps and stoplights.

"We need to improve traffic on Ralston," he said. "It's the only way in and out of town. Thirty percent of traffic on Ralston is just cutting

through. That's one out of every three cars that isn't stopping, or [the driver] doesn't live here. Do we want to make it harder for motorists to just cut through, or do we want to just slow them down?"

Warden would also like to create a slogan for the city. He listed slogans of other communities like San Carlos, The City of Good Living; and Daly City, the Gateway to the Peninsula.

He suggested Belmont's slogan should be "The Proudest Place on the Peninsula."

"We are going to become the best-run city in San Mateo County," he said. "And we're going to have the proudest residents of any city in the county. The word on the street is we're doing good and we're a solid organization. That's wonderful news and it's a nice feeling."

Wes Bowers
MARCH 9, 2002

Belmont mayor says city in good shape

Budget cuts should have little effect on residents, officials say

By Amy Yarbrough
STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — Peppering his speech with humor Thursday, Mayor Dave Warden highlighted plans for a new library, efforts to improve traffic, and even pledged to give Belmont its own slogan: the proudest place on the Peninsula.

Warden delivered his upbeat, state-of-the-city address — or “Dave’s infamous top-10 list,” as he called it — to a lunchtime crowd of more than 100 at the Iron Gate Restaurant.

Part of the good news, Warden said, is that Belmont has not been as hard hit as communities like Millbrae and Burlingame in the economic downturn.

While the city is looking to trim half a million dollars to eliminate a shortfall in its \$15 million budget, officials have said the cuts should have little noticeable effect on residents.

“We’re a lot better off than other cities,” said Warden, who teased city staff during his speech, and even joked about getting his braces off. “Everything is good right now and we’re doing it without major impacts to city services.”

Warden also spoke briefly about the need to develop plans for maintaining the city’s athletic fields, ongoing efforts to provide more space for the police department and the construction of a new city library.

Last March, voters passed — with 78.5 percent approval — an \$8.65 million bond measure to rebuild the 40-year-old library. In November or December, Warden said, Belmont will learn whether it will receive library grant money from the

state.

“It’s time,” he said. “The building has reached the end of its useful life.”

With a number of civic projects underway, the mayor said the city needs to focus on finding solutions to speeding and traffic congestion in the city — along busy Ralston Avenue in particular.

“Ralston is the only way out of town. Thirty percent of all the traffic on Ralston is traffic that cuts through Belmont,” Warden said. The city could either slow traffic as a deterrent to commuters or improve the flow to eliminate traffic jams.

“The question is, do we as a policy issue make it harder for people to come into town,” he said.

Officials are embarking on a number of traffic calming measures — things like speed humps and traffic circles — to slow down drivers and improve safety in problem spots like

Chula Vista Drive.

But first and foremost among recent achievements, Warden said, is after years of infighting the city council is gaining respect from the community.

“The council gets along. The council gets along with the staff, the council gets along with the public,” the mayor said, adding that this is the first time their been cooperation on the council in last 30 years.

The reason, he said, is that the city has been able to keep a good staff.

“Part of the issue with trust is we now have excellent leadership in the city,” Warden said, adding there has been little turnover since City Manager Jere Kersnar was hired by the city two years ago. Before Kersnar was hired, there were 30 staff vacancies, and now there are just four.

“The word on the street is we are a solid organization,” he said. “That’s a nice feeling.”

Pedaling a better commute

Bike to Work Day promotes health, environmental benefits of keeping your car at home

By KATHY SCHRENK
Independent Newspapers

To cyclists, biking to work offers the best of all worlds — money savings, exercise and the satisfaction of helping the environment.

With May 16 designated as Bike to Work Day, a number of county agencies hope to make riding to work easier and promote the advantages of the bicycle commute.

On May 16, groups like the Peninsula Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition will provide “energizer stations” at key bike-commute points

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SPECIAL TO THE INDEPENDENT

Belmont resident and Caltrain commuter Michael Karlovich, left, prepared to lift his bicycle into a northbound train headed for San Francisco from the Belmont train station Thursday morning.

BIKE: Commuters cycle

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such as the Redwood City Caltrain station, said coalition member Dani Weber.

The stations will offer beverages and food to cyclists from 6 to 9 a.m. and provide a festive, friendly atmosphere for meeting other cyclists and promoting bicycle commuting, Weber said.

That morning the group will also stage a "commute" between the San Mateo city Caltrain station and San Mateo City Hall starting at 7:45 a.m., said Weber. Riders will have the option of continuing beyond the 15-minute ride up 26th Avenue to Campus Drive, she said.

San Mateo Mayor Sue Lempert will be joining the ride herself, to "set an example" of the importance of bicycle commuting, she said. While she doesn't commute via bicycle, she said her husband has biked for years to the Caltrain station and "he loves it" for the convenience and the exercise.

San Mateo in general is trying to encourage more bike commuting with a bicycle committee that strives to seek cyclists' input when planning city projects, Lempert said. It also established a bicycle giveaway program for city employees who commit to biking to work a certain number of days per week.

The city is also working on a bike map. "We're trying to encourage as many people as we can to get out of their cars."

Other cities are now getting on the bike bandwagon. Belmont this spring will start offering "on-demand" bike lockers at its Caltrain station. The city is paying for this with a \$60,000 grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. The lockers will be available on a day-by-day basis to cyclists who get a key at the station. These lockers supplement the ones provided by Caltrain at each station, which are rented in six-month blocks, said Caltrain spokesperson Jayme Maltbie.

"These are more for the occasional user," said Maltbie about Belmont's new lockers.

Caltrain will also post representatives at the "energizer stations" to allow people to register their bikes for security on the trains, which provide space for 32 bikes during peak hours, said Maltbie.

San Carlos is also working to be more bike-friendly, said cyclist and Councilmember Matt Grocott. He hopes to see the city work on its bike lanes so they can link to other towns, he said. The city is also planning to take cyclists' needs into account when planning future projects, such as revamping Industrial Road.

All this is important not only to the environment, in terms of getting cars off the road, but also to the health of Peninsula residents, said Weber. One of the things that prevent people from biking to work is fear, she said. But following the rules of the road and taking proper safety precautions makes cycling on local streets quite safe.

Some potential cyclists may be scared off by rare incidents like the death last month of Jon Davidson, a local cyclist well known for regularly riding the Portola Valley Loop in his San Francisco 49ers jacket, wearing headphones and no helmet. He died in a collision with a car on Portola Road.

"If you ride following the rules of the road and you're predictable and visible, you're going to reduce your chances of getting hit by a car," said Weber. About 40,000 people get killed on the road each year and only about 700 are cyclists, she said. But 300,000 people a year die of ailments like heart disease and cancer, which are strongly linked with sedentary lifestyles.

"You're more likely to die if you don't bicycle than if you do," she said. "We have to encourage activity in our community."

Riding with traffic instead of against it, signaling turns and wearing a helmet are all ways people can reduce their chances of getting injured while riding.

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Child musicians win awards



SUSAN CALDWELL

Crestmont Conservatory of Music recently awarded its 2002 scholarships to gifted students in the area. Above, back row, Pianist Brian Connor, of San Carlos, won the Kathleen Fairbairn Memorial Award; Flutist Christopher O'Neill, of Belmont, won the William C. Petty Memorial Award. Front row, Pianist Audrey Harris, of Belmont, won second place for the Douglas W. Rouse Memorial Award; Pianist Shannon Miller, of San Carlos, won the Walter Benkman Memorial Award; Flutist Kelsey Cohan, of Belmont, won an honorable mention.

City battens down to weather fiscal storm

Officials budget for shortfall; wait on state

By WES BOWERS
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — As the state prepares to cut \$23 billion from its budget, the city must decide how to keep itself out of the red for this fiscal year.

Last March the city was faced with cutting about \$500,000 from its budget for the coming year, and now that the state's deficit has increased, it looks as if the city may be in the hole as much as \$750,000.

However, according to Finance Director Thomas Fil and City Manager Jere Kersnar, the city will weather the financial storm.

"We're not alone in this," said Kersnar. "Every local government in the state is struggling with the same issues we are, and there are some cities our size that are talking about \$2 million budget cuts. We have issues that are workable problems and we can use the first six months of the next fiscal year to create a plan and solve this."

'We have issues that are workable problems and we can use the first six months of the next fiscal year to create a plan and solve this.'

City Manager Jere Kersnar

Kersnar said the city is projecting to have \$2.4 million in its pocket next year, which is below its \$2.8 million goal, but above the \$2 million minimum it estimated earlier in the year.

"That means we're looking at restructuring to the tune of \$750,000, assuming there will be no significant state take-away," he said. "The state budget deficit is tremendous. Ours is a less than 5 percent

deficit, while theirs is a 25 percent deficit. We have a solid financial plan and we'll be in fine shape going into the fiscal year."

At its Feb. 26 meeting, the council was presented with the idea of cutting some public works positions indefinitely, reducing work with outside consultants and reducing overtime in the police department's investigations unit to make up for the deficit.

Fil said the city is anticipating a local recovery sometime

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BUDGET: City prepares for cutbacks

Continued from 1A

next year, along with increases in taxes and revenue.

Mayor Dave Warden hinted at postponing some projects the city has planned, and using money set aside for them to help pay the debt.

"I don't see things getting better in the future anytime soon," said Warden. "I'd like to see a variety or a ranking of projects we have lined up and see what we can do here. There are projects we have that we could look at postponing for the time being."

But Fil said using capital improvement funds, which are

used to pay for development projects in and around the downtown area, will not solve the problem in the long run.

"Many cities make the mistake of using capital funds to solve deficit problems," he said. "And \$750,000 will not go away by deferring one-time capital projects."

But because the state's budget has not yet been finalized, it is unclear at this point how much the city will actually have to cut this year.

"The problem could not just be thousands," said Fil. "We could have a million-dollar problem, depending on how

the state balances its budget later this year. The governor has already proposed to take some money away from us in the area of redevelopment, but he has said some will definitely be taken from our general fund."

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Belmont (City of)
The Under President
June 5, 2002

*City of Belmont
The Independent
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City pay and perks checked

Grand jury urges LAFCO to release survey more often

By Sara Zaske
Independent Newspapers

REDWOOD CITY — The jury is in on how well city councils and district boards treat themselves, and the results vary as much as San Mateo County does.

When the San Mateo County civil grand jury released the last six reports of its term on June 24, one report included a survey on the salaries and benefits of public officials.

The grand jury noted that the Local Agency Formation Commission had not done such a survey for six years. It not only recommended that LAFCO undertake a new survey every two years, but that the grand jury produce its own survey.

The result was broader in scope and more detailed than LAFCO previously collected, according to the grand jury report. It covered not only pay, but also benefits and reimbursements

for the public officials of 70 city and town councils, school boards and special districts in San Mateo County.

"We suspect that many citizens may be unaware of the fact that they provide such benefits to these officials," said Bruce Hasenkamp, the grand jury foreperson.

Hasenkamp said the grand jury's survey covers the most recently completed fiscal year, 2000-2001, and reflects figures provided by staff for the councils and boards.

The survey shows that actual pay for participating in government meetings varies widely.

Some cities, including Atherton and Portola Valley, pay their board members nothing and give no benefits or reimbursements for expenses such as travel time. Others, including Hillsborough, pay their councilmembers nothing, but provide some benefits.

For even the highest-paid, a councilmember's salary is close to the pay of a janitor.

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CITY COUNCIL COMPENSATION & BENEFITS SURVEY					
CITY	MEMBERS ON COUNCIL	ANNUAL PAY	ANNUAL BENEFITS & RETIREMENT	TOTAL REIMBURSED EXPENSES	ANNUAL COST
ATHERTON	5	0	0	0	0
BELMONT	5	37,743	6,609	2,412	46,764
BRISBANE	5	13,500	27,627	341	41,468
BURLINGAME	5	35,400	31,689	443	67,532
COLMA	5	42,555	38,819	149	81,523
DALY CITY	5	60,630	33,000	2,067	95,697
EAST PALO ALTO	5	22,200	11,152	20,011	53,363
FOSTER CITY	5	18,880	8,188	2,936	30,004
HALF MOON BAY	5	18,000	0	0	18,000
HILLSBOROUGH	5	0	17,178	1,800	18,978
MENLO PARK	5	38,400	12,404	6,131	56,935
MILLBRAE	5	11,910	15,491	498	27,899
PACIFICA	5	24,000	22,851	847	47,698
PORTOLA VALLEY	5	0	0	0	0
REDWOOD CITY	7	51,288	46,433	1,976	99,697
SAN BRUNO	5	24,000	11,145	1,474	36,619
SAN CARLOS	5	21,601	35,420	2,099	59,120
SAN MATEO	5	18,000	29,088	0	47,088
SSF	5	33,150	34,140	6,305	73,559
WOODSIDE	7	0	0	120	120

* Figures represent total actual pay, benefits and reimbursements for the entire council in 2000-2001. Individual councilmember costs may vary according to factors such as how many meetings a member attended, which benefits they accepted, etc.

PAY: Report

Continued from 1A

In Daly City, which pays its council the most, a councilmember who attended all the 2000-2001 meetings received \$13,008.

Other cities such as Redwood City and Colma provide swanky benefit packages that almost rival the salary. Colma even provides \$47 health club memberships for three councilmembers.

At a total board cost of \$46,433 per year, Redwood City appears to have the richest benefit package in the county.

"The benefits that are offered to our councilmembers are the same ones that are offered to our employees," said Redwood City's public information officer, Malcolm Smith. According to Smith, some part-time employees at the city also receive full benefits.

'We suspect that many citizens may be unaware of the fact that they provide such benefits to these officials.'

*Bruce Hasenkamp,
grand jury foreperson*

Councilmembers "put in different types of hours, a lot of evening hours and weekends," Smith said. "It's not exactly apples to apples ... but we want to make sure benefits won't dissuade anyone from working with Redwood City."

Smith also cautioned that the benefit cost appears high, but is paid for a seven-member council when other cities have only five-member councils.

At \$20,011, East Palo Alto has an extremely high rate of reimbursed expenses when other cities average only \$2,480. City Manager Sandy Solerno said the figure is large because the board went to a lot of conferences in the past year and spent some time lobbying in Washington D.C. "It's high, but it has definitely paid off in terms of grants we received," Solerno said.

Among school districts, the San Mateo Community College District has the most highly compensated board. The entire board received a total of \$62,545 in pay, benefits and reimbursed expenses in 2000-2001.

"For community colleges, that is not out of line," said Jim Albanese, associate chancellor for the community college district.

Albanese was slightly surprised that K-12 districts did not compensate their members at the same rate, but he noted that a seat on his board is a full-time job.

The grand jury recommended that LAFCO continue to survey the compensation and benefits of public officials every two years. LAFCO is a state-mandated agency that has jurisdiction over changes in city and district organization and boundaries within the county.

LAFCO Executive Officer Martha Poyatos said the agency conducted the last compensation survey in 1996 as part of a larger study. She said reductions in staff have hindered the agency's ability to complete other studies. Poyatos is now the only employee of LAFCO.

Nevertheless, Poyatos said the agency would try to conduct the survey and distribute it to the public every two years.

"We can make it available on our website, get it out to libraries and certainly do a press release to let people know it is available. But the crux, the backbone for LAFCO is not compensation of elected officials," Poyatos said. "It's not under LAFCO's jurisdiction."

Among the other reports released, the grand jury also recommended that the county assessor further decrease the time it takes to evaluate commercial and real estate property, which could have a significant effect on property taxes.

The grand jury also recommended merging three agencies, the Transportation Authority, C/CAG and SamTrans, which control transportation funding in the county.

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City of Belmont
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City drafts policy on public art

Commission creates guidelines for displays

BY WES BOWERS
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — The creativity behind Belmont's art is being harnessed in an effort to develop a policy on placing such masterpieces in public spaces.

For several years the city has wanted to create guidelines for displaying art on public

land. With an Arts Commission now up and running, the city is beginning the process of determining what kind of art is appropriate, where it should be placed and for how long. Council will take a first look at the proposal at its July 23 meeting.

"The issue revolves around two things," said City Manager Jere Kersnar. "The first is assuming you get a piece of art donated to the

city. Who decides if you want to keep it or not? Or suppose a sculptor wants to donate a four-story statue. How do you tell them you don't want it or if you do?"

In the past, the city has had to deal with such issues. Having a policy in place would alleviate a lot of the questions that arise when someone donates a piece of art to the city.

"The generation of this
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ARTS: Policy

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policy is kind of what drove the idea of having an Arts Commission," said Councilmember Terri Cook. "Someone came along one day and wanted to put a piece of art in Twin Pines Park, and we gave it to the Parks and Recreation Department because they manage the park. There wasn't anything in place to figure out who should deal with this sort of thing."

Arts Commissioner Judi Allen said the commission looked at other cities in the state that had implemented similar policies, and used those as models to start the foundation for Belmont's policy.

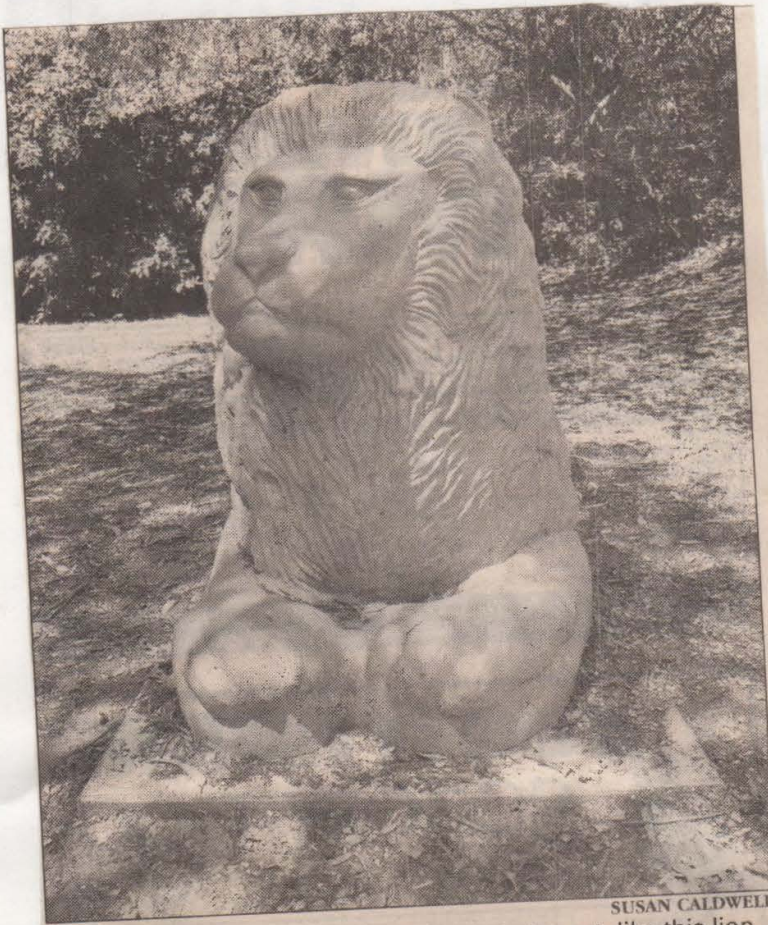
Belmont's policy will address several issues. One is the city's procedure for purchasing art.

"What happens if we have money available," Kersnar said. "How do we decide what kind of art to purchase and who makes the decision to purchase it? In the long run, sometimes you have artwork that the city no longer wants. How do you get rid of it? This can be a really tricky policy."

Mayor Dave Warden said he doesn't mind a policy, as long as artists aren't given the runaround or forced to go through several bureaucratic loops to get their art on display.

"I think it sets something in motion for the city to actively acquire artwork for display," said Warden. "A lot of it has to do with acquisition, retention and disposition, and I'd support a policy as long as it wasn't overly restrictive."

Warden added, "It has to do with what kind of artwork we want to put on display and what do we do with it once we have it. Say someone wants to give us some artwork, how do we decide where and how to display it? What if the city doesn't want to display it? There's nothing defined right now, but we're going to formalize an agreement between the city and the commission and put something in place."



SUSAN CALDWELL

The city wants to develop a policy on placing art, like this lion in Twin Pines Park, in public places.

Hahn set to run for city clerk

Former councilmember will square off against Cook

By Wes Bowers
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Three weeks ago, Councilmember Terri Cook surprised many in the city by announcing that she intends to run for the city clerk position.

Now, another resident with experience in city government has also expressed interest in running for the job.

Former councilmember Eleanor Hahn has thrown her hat in the ring for the position after almost a year out of the political spotlight.

Hahn's seat was up for re-election in November, but she chose not to run again, saying she was tired of the council's inability to get along. At that time, she was uncertain if she would return to city government and politics. But she decided to run for clerk when she learned the council would not be appointing Kathy Kern to fill the remainder of her term.

"I was really surprised that the council didn't appoint Kathy to the position after she moved," said Hahn. "I feel that was my ultimate decision in running for the position was when she resigned and wasn't appointed again."

Kern announced earlier this year that she was stepping down from her longtime position as city clerk because she was moving to San Mateo. She had requested the City Council to appoint her to fill the remainder of her term, which ends in November 2003.

Council, however, decided not to appoint Kern and instead to hold a special election this November to elect someone to fill the seat.

This is not the first time Hahn has considered running for the position. She actually considered running in 1995, when former city clerk Doti Hall left.

"I remember one councilmember telling me that there was no one to appoint to the position after

CLERK: page 13A

CLERK: Hahn, Cook to square off in November

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Doti retired, and I was actually thinking about running for the position then. But then Kathy [who had been deputy clerk] moved to Belmont and ran for it, so I decided not to run at that time."

Although Kern announced her resignation in April, Hahn did not know about the situation until mid-May.

"I hadn't heard that Kathy had resigned until I came back from vacation," she said. "I was gone for about three weeks and hadn't heard anything about it, and didn't know she had stepped down

until I got home, and at that point I decided to run."

Hahn said she hopes even more people consider running to give residents a broader spectrum of candidates. "There could be other people that decide in the next few weeks to run," she said. "I think it would be healthy if other people run, it would give the residents more choices."

While it has been said that the position is not one that just anyone can walk into, Hahn believes she has the know-how and skills to fill the job.

"I feel very qualified with my

background and experience," she said. "I worked at IBM before going into real estate, I know what the city clerk's duties are and I know the city well. So I think I have the qualifications necessary to do a good job."

Mayor Dave Warden did not want to comment on the race between Cook and Hahn. Cook did not return phone calls as of press time.

One person in Hahn's corner is former councilmember Pam Rianda, who said Hahn had been considering the idea of running for some time. She said although she hasn't spoken to Hahn at length about

it, she was still behind her all the way.

"I know she's always had it in the back of her mind," Rianda said. "And I know she was thinking about it back when Kathy ran for it, so it's always been there. I'm behind her 100 percent. I think she'll be an outstanding candidate this November and she'd be a great person for the job."

Belmont voters will elect the new city clerk on Nov. 5.

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by the newspapers
May 18, 2002

City of Belmont
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July 2, 02

City's hospitality ranked

Officials review resident survey results, plans minor changes

By Wes Bowers
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Belmont is a nice place to live and a generally helpful city, according to the results of the city's most comprehensive resident survey in seven years.

City officials recently reviewed the answers of 702 residents who participated in a survey distributed to approximately 3,500 residents last April.

"This is the first comprehensive survey done in Belmont since 1995," said Assistant City Manager Dan Rich. "Staff thought it was time to conduct another to see how the city is doing now."

Of the 702 respondents, Rich said 362 submitted their results through the Internet, while 416 wrote or verbalized their responses.

Overall, he said, 91 percent of those who responded to the survey rated Belmont as an above-average place to live, while only 1 percent gave the city a poor rating.

"I think that's pretty remarkable and shows that the majority of our residents love living here in Belmont," Rich said.

However, Rich said that of the 416 respondents who verbalized their results, 218 mentioned the word traffic. Results from the survey showed that 49 percent of the residents said the biggest problem was traffic, followed by traffic safety at 41 percent and street maintenance at 38 percent.

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As for city staff's overall helpfulness, Rich said 72 percent of residents were very satisfied. Some of the more important issues on residents' minds were police and fire services, which also received the most favorable satisfaction rating, he said.

The city clerk position and parking issues were the least important to residents, while building permits and traffic concerns had the lowest satisfaction rating.

"I think it tells us that people are pretty satisfied with the way things are going," said Councilmember Terri Cook. "There's always room for improvement and this will be a good tool for us to make those improvements. The areas that really need those improvements, like traffic and parking, are no surprise to us. But it definitely reiterates that's what we need to focus on."

The results were compared to 25 other cities that conducted similar surveys in the last few years, Rich said. Belmont fared the same or better than the others in several categories.

"Compared to other cities, we're above average in several categories like garbage, feeling of safety and obtaining city information," he said. "But we're below average in street maintenance, traffic safety, animal control and library services, although we'll be remedying the library situation in a couple of years. And we have a fair comparison when it comes to police and fire services, utilities and the overall quality of city services."

Staff will conduct another citizens' opinion survey in two years, Rich said. In the meantime, it will start working on some of the concerns raised by citizens through this survey.

"We're going to start looking for strategies to improve service and satisfaction," he said. "We'll look for trends and major issues. In those 67 pages of survey results there may be buried treasures like a broken light on a certain street corner, so we'll look for specific things we can solve right away and get to work on."

The city may also send their results to other cities similar to Belmont that could be interested in conducting their own citizens' opinion survey.

"I think it would be helpful to send press releases to other cities to let them know we have this data," said Mayor Dave Warden. "That way if they do a similar survey in the future they can look at it and use it to compare to their own results."

Look for the complete survey results on the city's website at <http://www.belmont.gov>.

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CITY OF BELMONT
SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES
JULY 4, 2002

Belmont mediates with S.F. architect

By Tim Hay
STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — The city, which has wrangled with a San Francisco-based architectural company over plans to upgrade police facilities, has taken its grievances to a mediating board.

But details remain scarce on what Belmont hopes to gain from "potential litigation claims" against the company.

EKONA Architects was hired in 1999 to draw up plans and cost estimates for a new police building, city documents said. Officers had complained their current building is leaky and overcrowded.

The architect reportedly said its plan for a new building would cost about \$5.2 million.

"That's what we built our budget on," City Manager Jere Kersnar said Wednesday.

But city officials were shocked when bids for the work came in at about 52 percent higher than EKONA's estimate. The four bids received ranged from about \$7.9 million to \$8.2 million, Kersnar said.

Belmont scrapped the plan, and returned to an earlier idea to move the police station into an expanded City Hall.

The city attorney recommended the hiring of John Blackman of the firm Farbstein and Blackman to represent Belmont in the "mediation of claims and potential litigation claims against Ekona," a Feb. 26 report from the city said.

Kersnar confirmed the case has gone to a mediating panel, but refused to elaborate.

"I can't talk about it," he said, "because it is a legal matter."

Principals at EKONA — a large firm which has designed public buildings up and down the Peninsula — could not be reached for comment.

Unusual number plan to run for city clerk

Former and current councilmembers plan campaign for position

By Wes Bowers
Independent Newspaper

BELMONT — Another former city councilmember's name could appear on this November's special election ballot for the city clerk position.

Former councilmember Nancy Levitt says she's considering a run for the office. Levitt would join former councilmember Eleanore Hahn and current Councilmember Terri Cook in bidding for former city clerk Kathy Kern's seat.

"I find it very interesting that the three people who have expressed inter-

est so far have been former or current councilmembers," said Councilmember George Metropulos. "I'm guessing that everyone who is interested still wants to serve the community in some way."

That's exactly why Levitt said she decided to run for the position.

Levitt is retiring from her job at Hewlett-Packard later this year and being elected city clerk would be a pay cut for her. But she says she doesn't care about the money.

"There may be some people who run and start making less than what they're making now," she said. "But then there are also people that might run and win, and they're making three or four times more than what they

were."

Belmont's city clerk position pays \$75,000 a year. According to former city clerk Jim McLaughlin, the new city clerk will earn every penny.

"It's well worth the salary or more," he said. "The city clerk is on call 24 hours a day to do what must be done. If the council calls for an immediate meeting, the clerk has to be there to set it up and get things ready. Just like you need lights in the council chambers, you have to have the clerk too."

Some of the clerk's other duties include posting and publishing public notices, mailing legal notices, accepting petitions and filing council and city official expenses to the Fair Political Practices Commission.

The clerk is responsible for recording, transcribing and indexing minutes from council meetings. The clerk then has to draft the minutes into a public document for posting, which McLaughlin said can be a very tedious procedure.

"I'd spend about two hours drafting those minutes," said McLaughlin. "Sometimes I'd go home and do them if they were going to take a while. It's a very demanding job. It's more than a job sometimes, it's a way of life."

In most cities, few choose to run for the post, Metropulos said.

"If you look up and down the clerk elections throughout the county, you'll find that many aren't contested," he

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said. "You'll rarely find anyone running against each other, and now here in Belmont we have at least two running against each other, and they've both served on the council."

Rumors have circulated that Hahn is running solely because she has a grudge against her current opponent Cook. Metropulos couldn't confirm that, but he said Cook's decision to run could have affected the number of candidates who have come forward.

"I think it would have been interesting to see who would have come out if Terri hadn't announced her intent to run," he said. "But you never know who's going to come out and it will probably keep getting interesting as the filing deadline approaches."

Hahn said the fact that all interested candidates are councilmembers hadn't really crossed her mind.

"As I've said before, competition is healthy," she said. "As far as individual candidates go, I think we need to wait until the filing period to see who the real serious candidates are."

Levitt agreed. "There's been a lot of talk, but nothing has been definite," she said. "I've heard a lot of people say they're thinking about it. And it's also been like sitting around the dinner table, where someone says 'Well, why don't you run.' But no one has said they are actually going to run."

Wes Bowers can be reached at 556-1556, Ext. 6 or via e-mail at wbowers@smIndependent.com.

City's permitting process to get a makeover

Officials address problems with process that frustrates developers, citizens

By Wes Bowers
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — There may be a newer, faster and easier way for families to obtain permits when remodeling or building their homes.

The City Council will consider consolidating several small permits or a few larger permits into one permit to make the design review process easier for applicants.

The Planning Commission was presented with the idea at its July 2 meeting and agreed to make a recommendation to the council.

"We've come to the realization that we've got a whole bunch of different

permits that relate to single-family design when we could really just consolidate them all into one," said City Manager Jere Kersnar. "The question is, do we want to start streamlining all these permits into one."

Residents, developers and contractors have been frustrated with the Belmont Planning Department for years, saying that it could take anywhere from weeks to months just to get one permit approved.

Some have also complained about how many permits they have had to get for just one project and have voiced their concerns to the city both publicly and at the department's office in City Hall.

We want to make it easier for people to understand and to get through the whole process of design review, said Director of Community Planning

Craig Ewing.

Ewing made a presentation to the council last year about how design issues could be improved. And over the course of the last year the city has made an effort to make the building, planning and design processes easier.

By holding community forums and getting residents' and project applicants' input, as well as changing some laws and opening a new one-stop permit counter in City Hall, the city is on its way to better serving homeowners and developers, Ewing said.

"We opened the one-stop permit center earlier this year," he said. "And we've identified problems that could be solved by making changes to zoning codes and laws. But we feel there's still more we could do to make things easier."

The council will review three options

for further smoothing out permit issues.

One option would be to just change the basic wording of the permit so applicants can better understand it.

A second option is to consolidate many small permits such as grading and variance into one permit. Currently, project applicants must apply for these permits separately.

The third option is to give some flexibility to already existing permits, such as granting a setback on a project the city would find complex.

Consolidating permits would reduce costs to the applicant and allow planners to work with more people, said Ewing. And the third option is a kind of looseness in the rules. The Planning Commission was willing to look at consolidating permits, but

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they're a bit unsure about the other two options.

"We're asking how much change does the council want," he added. "The council could say go ahead with all three options or just go with permit consolidation."

Council will decide whether or not to adopt all, some or none of the options on July 23.

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trail.

City boards shuttle bus movement

Officials debate merits of in-town service similar to San Carlos, R.C.

By WES BOWERS
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — In an effort to alleviate traffic congestion, the city is jumping on a regional trend to provide free in-town shuttle service.

However, costs, funding sources and shuttle routes all remain up in the air.

The idea to create a Belmont shuttle program was inspired by the Shores Shuttle in Redwood Shores, and a residential concern about access to public transportation in town.

"We're still in the early stages of the program's creation," said City Manager Jere Kersnar. "We're at the point right now to try to gain some momentum and public support for a shuttle program. But we want to look at the feasibility, how we might fund it and where the routes would go."

In the late '70s, Belmont had a shuttle called Belmont Urban Service that transported people to various points around town, said Councilmember George Metropulos. That service has since been replaced by SamTrans.

"Years ago, each city had its own bus system which had small buses that ran through all the hillsides," said Kersnar. "When SamTrans formed, they took over all the little bus sys-

tems and slowly got rid of them, opting to focus on the main lines they have now."

In recent years SamTrans has cut some of its routes, including some in Belmont, leaving the city with just one route that travels up and down Ralston Avenue and into a couple of hillside neighborhoods.

However, the service only runs every hour, and not many passengers are ever seen on the bus.

"I think it would be great to have, if we can figure out if we can fund it and if people will use it," said Councilmember Terri Cook. "I know Redwood City has one that's on demand, where you call ahead of time and schedule a pick-up time. If we could do something like that it would certainly be worthwhile to look into a program."

"The idea is to get people to public transportation outlets," she added. "And there's a severe lack of public transportation in Belmont unless you live along the main roads."

Metropulos agreed. "A lot of people want to travel from neighborhood to neighborhood, and there's really no way to do that besides walking or driving," he said. "Some kids live a mile away from the school they attend and many parents don't want their kids

SHUTTLE: Funding unknown

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walking that far by themselves, so a shuttle would be really useful for everyone."

While councilmembers are supportive of the idea, their main concern about getting it off the ground is lack of funding.

"I like the idea of having a service but it's a matter of where the money comes from to fund something like this," he said. "We're on the verge of talking about developing a downtown and I think we should take a look at implementing something like this as well."

Cook suggested the city could apply for funds and grants, but Councilmember Dave Bauer said there is a downside to grants and the

program's unknown cost.

"I think it's a great idea but I don't know how we're going to fund it," said Bauer. "Grants are only year-to-year funds, and it wouldn't serve to start a program and then shut it down when grants run out."

Kersnar said the city will be looking at shuttle programs in other communities such as Redwood City, San Mateo and San Carlos, to get an idea of how to implement a program of its own.

The council will look at a shuttle plan and consider hiring a consultant at its Nov. 12 meeting.

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