

Councilwoman In Belmont Facing Recall

Web site shows official's
photo in spider web

By Marshall Wilson
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A Web site and recall effort directed at a veteran Belmont councilwoman are the latest salvos in a city known for acrimonious politics that seem to be growing more bitter by the day.

A group of Belmont residents say three-term Councilwoman Pam Rianda has abused her authority and masterminded the resignation of the city manager. They ask for her recall on a Web site featuring a smiling photo of Rianda stuck in a spider web.

"We picked the person we believe is truly the cause of the problem," said Allen Cary, a self-employed marketing consultant and chairman of the recall effort. "If you

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try to find out what the common thread is, the common thread is Pam Rianda."

Rianda, a former mayor and school board member with 18 months left on her third council term, said the opponents are the ones with the problem.

"I believe the residents of Belmont are bright enough and smart enough to be able to target this as the trash that is it," she said. "I'm finishing up 16 years of devoted service to Belmont, and I think people understand that."

The recall effort is not the only

political controversy in Belmont.

A person who picked the nom de plume "Waldo" has been distributing the Belmont Watchdog, a newsletter with inflammatory comments about Rianda and those perceived as her allies. The talk of the town is the attempts to find out the identity of Waldo, who gives as an address a mailing and printing business on Old County Road.

Employees there refused to divulge their client list.

Recall backers yesterday said they are not connected to Waldo nor do they know who is the author of the widely distributed newsletter.

Cary, meanwhile, said he and other opponents started the Web

Based Recall Campaign

site, www.recallrianda.com, as a way to get the word out. The site is bare bones except for the spider web and contact information, but Cary said the organizers plan to post more information in the coming days.

Cary said he and others began the recall effort after Susan Westman resigned as city manager in March, complaining of meddling council members who interfered with her duties. Westman declined to name names.

"We believe pretty firmly that (Rianda) led to the ousting of Susan Westman who by any yardstick was a great city manager," said Eric Dentler, a recall supporter. "Driving

her out was the last straw."

Rianda said she did no such thing. Westman, she said, quit without ever voicing concerns to the council.

"I will continue to go about my business with people who care about Belmont," she said. "To be so consumed with hatred and evil that it dominates their very being, you have to have compassion for those people."

Rianda blamed "real estate and development interests" for financing her opponents, charges they deny. Rianda said she has served as a lightning rod because of her opposition to growth.

Councilman Dave Warden, who has also been the target of the Waldo newsletter, called the author "cowardly" for not printing his or her name. As for the recall effort, he said opponents should challenge Rianda if she seeks another term in November 2001.

"We somehow, by nature, seem to have a more divisive atmosphere in this town, and that's unfortunate," he said. "We need to get over that and move forward."

To force a recall vote, opponents must file a notice of intent with the city. They would have 120 days to collect signatures from 20 percent of the 13,608 registered voters in Belmont.

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Move is on to recall Rianda in Belmont

By T.S. Mills-Faraudo
STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — There's a movement in Belmont to kick Pam Rianda off the City Council over claims that she micromanaged city managers and wasted money.

Losing City Manager Susan Westman sparked the recall effort, said Allen Cary, chairman of the movement. "She's micromanaged out a number of city managers and has cost the city thousands and probably millions," he said.

Rianda believes developers and real estate interests are behind the effort to have her recalled. "I have consistently pushed for protecting open space," she said.

The attempt to boot her off

the board has been posted on the Internet. At www.recallrianda.com, there's a picture of Rianda's head with a backdrop of cobwebs. On the Web site's home page, a statement from the group reads: "Recallrianda.com represents a citizens group dedicated to ending the abuse of power practiced by councilwoman Pam Rianda by means of a recall petition."

The Web site's volunteer form states that "thousands" of residents are supporting this effort. But the only name on the site is Cary's. He wouldn't disclose how many people are involved in the recall effort. "We have plenty of proponents supporting us," he said.

The Belmont City Clerk had not received a request for Rianda to be recalled at press time Tuesday.

In order to request a recall, the group must submit to the city clerk 10 signatures and a 200-word statement saying why it wants her recalled. The statement must be published in a newspaper. Within seven days after the statement is submitted, Rianda would have a chance to respond in 200 words or less.

The group must create a petition and submit it to the city. Once the city clerk certifies the petition, the group has 120 days to get 20 percent of registered voters in Belmont to sign it. If the group gets the signatures, the petition then goes to the City Council, which determines when the matter will be voted on. Rianda was re-elected in November 1997 for a four-year term.

Council member Dave Warden agrees with Rianda regarding real estate and developers holding a grudge against her. "I think there's an agenda. I think there's been a lot of bitterness toward Pam from the developer and real-estate community," he said.

But Cary said it isn't the real estate and developer community that's heading this effort to kick Rianda out of office. "I'm a marketing consultant. I have nothing to do with real estate," Cary said.

Rianda also thinks this group is probably the same people who were upset over her decision to vote in new commissioners.

"I voted in new people because I wanted to give someone

else a chance, and the people I voted in represent a large, diverse area," she said.

Council member Eleanor Hahn also believes there's no reason Rianda should be recalled.

"I have no problem with Pam," Hahn said. "I think she's very conscientious about things."

There's been speculation that whoever posted this Web site was also behind the "Belmont Watchdog" by Waldo, a flier slamming Rianda that was written by an anonymous author and sent out to residents last April.

"We have no connection with Waldo. We don't know who Waldo is. I'm not Waldo," Cary said.

Recall - 2000
The Independent
May 17, 2000

Rianda recall plan gets underway

Effort to oust councilmember builds cyber-momentum

By Amy Yarbrough
Staff Reporter

Backers of a plan to oust long-time Belmont councilmember Pam Rianda might be racing a tight deadline to place a recall initiative on the November ballot.

Word of the recall effort spread last week, days after organizers launched an Internet site featuring a picture of the third-term councilmember's face in a spider web. The website accused Rianda of forcing the resignation of Belmont's former city manager, "micromanaging" and delaying costly city projects.

"We have to cut the head off the hydra," said Allen Cary, chairman of the "Recall Rianda" committee. (Hydra is a Greek word for serpent.)

At press time, Cary said that the group was planning to file initial paperwork for the recall within a week. Cary, who owns a consulting business, said Rianda makes it difficult for businesses to operate in Belmont. He added that the resignation of former City Manager Susan Westman was the factor that really launched the recall campaign.

Westman resigned in March, citing that involvement of some councilmembers in the daily operations of City Hall made it difficult to do her job.

"It's unfortunate that Pam Rianda wasn't up for reelection last time, because we wouldn't

have this problem," Cary said, adding that backers are currently drumming up information and support for the effort.

Rianda called the claims on the website "psycho babble" and said supporters of the recall effort are being vindictive because of what they see as personal slights.

"This is a very small, disenfranchised group of people," said Rianda, who believes her opponents have real estate and development interests and are lashing out of her because of recent commission appointments, which ushered out three longtime members of the Parks and Recreation Commission. "You've got Eric Dentler who's upset because his wife was not re-appointed," she said.

"If you can't produce proof, you know it's a shallow shell," Rianda said, adding that if she "micromanaged," it was to ask questions for the benefit of the community. "I really believe the people who returned me to office ... know who and what I am."

Former councilmember Adele Della Santina, whose name is on the recall website as a "member at large," disputed Rianda's claims that personal interests motivate the effort, saying "The bottom line is the dollar amount she's costing the citizens."

Della Santina was often the dissenting vote during her time on

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the council. She accuses Rianda of delaying construction of one Fire Station 14, a facility near Ralston Avenue and El Camino Real. Della Santina, a realtor, pointed out that she was the only member of her profession represented in the council. Some believe "Recall Rianda" is connected to a political newsletter which has been critical of several council members, penned anonymously by a person or group calling themselves, "Waldo," which has been circulated several times since November.

Cary denied any connection between the two efforts, but said Recall Rianda had received an e-mail from Waldo that complimented their website. For a recall vote, organizers must file a notice of intention with the city clerk's office, no longer than 200 words, which must be then be published in a newspaper. The elected official being recalled may then file a rebuttal. Organizers would then have 120 days to collect signatures representing 20 percent or roughly 2,800 of Belmont's registered voters.

Councilmember Dave Warden said organizers would have little time to gather enough signatures and take the necessary steps to get the recall on the November ballot. He doubts voters would favor the cost of a special election, considering Rianda has little more than a year left of her current term. The group technically has four months to gather the signatures needed to place a recall initiative on the ballot. However, they must meet an August deadline to qualify for the November election, or face a costly special election that can cost upwards of \$30,000.

"I think this whole thing is being organized by people who have political and financial agendas," Warden said. He added that several months ago the council came to an agreement they would support each other and he feels the city could be spending time on better things than a recall effort. "Maybe Pam should sit down and talk to these people," he said.

At press time, the organizer's website had received 906 visits. Noted on the site are four committee members and 22 supporters.