

Charges exchanged in flap over shopping center

An Aptos businessman — who is also a supervisorial candidate — is under fire from the county and possibly facing prosecution because he allegedly violated the county building code and the coastal act.

He is Larry Knight, a floor covering store operator and builder of a small shopping center adjacent to the Rio del Mar shopping center.

Knight, however, attributes his problems to the man he is trying to oust from the board of supervisors — Dale Dawson — accusing Dawson backers of a "political smear" and Dawson himself with "conflict of interest." est."

Knight also says Phil Sanfilippo, head of the building inspection department for the county, was "constantly harrassing me and threatening me with red tape," all, because he is a candidate.

The county and Ed Brown, executive director of the coastal commission, counter with the specifics of how Knight allegedly violated the county code and the coastal act.

The controversy was aired late last week when it was reported that Knight had been notified by coastal commission officials as well as the county that parts of his shopping center were in violation of the law. Knight and his lawyers were to have met with the district attorney on Monday to discuss the matter.

In a letter to Knight, Brown said, "You may be subject to prosecution by the attorney general and to penalties" under the coastal act.

"It is my determination," Brown wrote, "that the project as constructed is in substantial variance to that which received a permit from the Central Coast Commission in 1974 and that a new permit for modification is required."

Meanwhile, the county had already red-tagged part of the shopping center presently under construction near Aptos Wharf Road. A spokesman for the building department said the stop-work order was issued because the building is 80 feet away from the spot it was shown on Knight's county permit.

The coastal commission listed other "discrepancies" between the coastal permit and the shopping center project. For instance, Brown said the commission issued a permit for six shops in the center and that seven shops have been built, and that an area shown on the plans as landscaping "is covered by building or parking area."

Knight labeled the charges as "a cheap political smear propagated by the Dale Dawson forces." Knight denied that he was in violation of the terms of the permit granted him and accused

Brown of being motivated in making the accusations by the fact he is "a staunch Dale Dawson supporter."

Said Knight, "My coastal commission permit was issued two years ago. Now, two years later, after I have announced my candidacy for supervisor, Ed Brown suddenly decides my project has some modifications."

Knight's counter-attack was rebutted by county officials, who said that three stop-work orders were issued on the shopping center in January and February. Sanfilippo said that Knight "had ample notification" of the building code violations prior to Knight's announcement that he was entering the supervisorial race, and that the actions "have absolutely no political implications."

Brown said, "The conduct of my business has nothing to do with partisan politics or supervisorial elections. . . I know Dale Dawson as an acquaintance but not as a close personal friend."

Although the matter has been referred to the district attorney and attorney general for possible actions, all agencies said they hoped the matter could be worked out without taking it to court.

Sanfilippo said the building was red-tagged on Jan. 16 after Knight was told of the "violations" and if he went ahead with construction. The job was red-tagged twice more after Knight proceeded with the work, Sanfilippo said.

Dawson said that Knight "is well aware that he did not comply with the permit process. His charges are not true and he knows they are not true."

Knight's lawyer said he would go to court to seek a writ of mandamus which would allow Knight to finish the building without going back through the permit process.

On Monday, Knight renewed his charges against Dawson, saying he "pushed Walter Monasch aside and appointed Phil Sanfilippo. . . to take charge of my project."

He accused Dawson of conflict of interest, saying he represented "a client who was in litigation against me (Sweeney and Sons, a Santa Clara building contractor). I kept telling myself that Dawson wouldn't let a conflict of interest influence his decision with me."

Knight said that Sanfilippo later called him to say that the building department didn't consider Knight's permits valid and that he would have to go through the permit process again.

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