

Scotts Valley official

# Controlled-growth group's actions promoting growth

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SCOTTS VALLEY — The chief building inspector says no one promotes development more in the city than the Committee For Orderly Growth — the organization that seeks to halt construction until the General Plan is overhauled.

"Ironically, nobody has done more to accelerate growth than the very people who are trying to stop it," Building Inspector Paul Burke said Wednesday.

Burke said his paperwork "backed up immediately" after the committee filed a lawsuit three weeks ago to halt industrial and commercial development on the grounds the General Plan — the city's major planning document — is illegal.

Burke said builders are hurrying to secure permits before May 19, the date of a Superior Court hearing on the validity of points in the lawsuit.

Burke said those seeking permits would have eventually asked anyway, but the pace has accelerated to the point there is a "big impact" on his workload.

The stampede includes developers of two restaurants and retail shops in the Scotts Village shopping center on Mount Hermon Road, a large complex of townhouses off Bean Creek Road behind the Kings Village shopping center, four units of apartments on Quien Sabe and an office building on Scotts Valley Drive.

"These were just plodding along, and now, they must have their permits by May 19," said Burke, whose desk is piled with blueprints and reports.

This is not the first time Burke has witnessed the phenomenon.

The same thing happened about a year ago when the committee promoted a June ballot measure that would have slowed development, including housing construction.

The measure failed to win voter approval, but in the meantime there was a rush on building permits.

That rush to develop some 1.5 million square feet of industrial and commercial land triggered a pre-election lawsuit filed by the committee. The committee maintained the city was approving permits without enough environmental review.

The lawsuit was filed by the committee against the city and named 17 developers

as "real parties in interest."

The largest development was a manufacturing plant to be built by Harmony Foods, the maker of natural food snacks whose logo is a multi-colored rainbow.

The suit was ultimately settled with only two of the developers — Harmony and the second-largest developer, First Scotts Valley Inc., — paying any money. In the settlement, the city agreed to join a task force to study water in north Santa Cruz County with the two companies paying a total of \$7,000 to cover the city cost of joining the task force and to upgrade the sewer system.

At the time of the settlement in October, the committee's lawyer, Thomas Brown, said he saw the settlement as a political healer for the community.

Five months later, Harmony withdrew its plans for the 244-square-foot manufacturing plant planned near Sky Park Airport.

In January, the committee's former president, David Schmidt, gave the mayor the check for \$7,000 that had been gleaned from the two companies. In a goodwill gesture, Schmidt shook hands with Mayor Rey Retzlaff and gave the mayor a sign reading "Let's see Scotts Valley do it right."

But the truce did not last long. At public hearing that night, after the mayor gavelled down speakers who were protesting development, Schmidt's wife, Judy, stalked the council podium and grabbed the gavel from the mayor.

The committee's lawyer, for today's lawsuit is Mitchell Page, a legal crusader for environmentalist causes who is also a county planning commissioner, appointed by San Lorenzo-Scotts Valley Supervisor Joe Cucchiara.

In what appears to be another stab at political fence-mending, the committee is now sponsoring a neighborhood crime prevention program in which the committee uses literature from the American Association of Retired Persons, National Retired Teachers Association and National Sheriff's Association.

The committee kicked off the program at the same time residents were giving the committee flak about filing a lawsuit at a time when the city doesn't have much money to fight legal battles.