

City attorney to retire next year

Employees - City

John Barisone has been top legal adviser nearly 25 years

By J.M. Brown

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SANTA CRUZ » City Attorney John Barisone, who for nearly 25 years has advised a rotating cast of city leaders on thorny problems such as earthquake recovery, university growth and battles over preservation versus economic development, will retire March 31.

Barisone, 62, was appointed



Barisone

firm has been the city's legal adviser for 52 years.

Barisone, who has 36 years le-

the city's top legal official in 1990 after serving three years as an assistant city attorney upon moving to Santa Cruz to work with now-retired partner Rod Atchison, whose

gal experience, will remain with the firm on a part-time, "of counsel" basis. He and wife Susan, a lawyer at the firm who also intends to retire, will remain Santa Cruz residents.

In a letter to the City Council on Wednesday, Barisone said he assured them "how profoundly privileged, thankful, honored and blessed I have been to be able to have served the city."

Barisone told the council of his

retirement plans during recent personnel evaluations.

"John's steady hand and straightforward style has served the city well for decades," Santa Cruz Mayor Lynn Robinson said. "I know I speak for the entire council as I thank him for his outstanding service and wish him a happy and healthy future retirement."

On June 24, the council will consider continuing the contract with Atchison, Barisone, Condotti & Kovacevich, with partner Anthony Condotti widely expected

to assume Barisone's role. However, the council also could decide to open the contract to bids.

Barisone has served for 14 years as the city attorney for Capitola, and the firm also provides legal advice to Half Moon Bay, where Condotti is the lead attorney.

In an interview Tuesday, Barisone said his work has been challenging.

"This job is one where you have to go at 100 mph 100 percent of the time," he said.

The plain-spoken Barisone

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said he will travel and exercise more while still in good health though he also may teach or study history. One might wonder, given his 15-year habit of pairing cowboy boots with suits, whether he also might fancy horse riding or country line dancing in retirement.

No, "they're just comfortable," he said.

Although occasionally Barisone has taken heat for rules like cracking down on illegal camping or decisions supporting controversial projects, the lawyer said he has sought to simply take direction from the council, whose majority can change as often as every two years.

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— John Barisone

"You really cannot be concerned with the politics of any of those objectives," he said. "If you do, you won't have the trust of future city councils."

While Barisone has seen many interesting cases — the litigation and ultimate settlement with UC Santa Cruz over growth plans, as well as emergency declarations necessitated by the Loma Prieta quake — the past several years have been difficult emo-

tionally.

In 2011, Assistant City Attorney Celestial Cassman was murdered by a former boyfriend, and when Barisone climbs the stairs each morning to his office overlooking City Hall, he still looks over toward Cassman's desk, expecting to greet her.

"I still haven't gotten used to the fact that she is not there," he said.

In 2013, police detective Sgt. Loran "Butch" Baker

JOHN BARISONE

Who: Santa Cruz city attorney retiring March 31 after 25 years

Age: 62

Residence: Santa Cruz

Education: Graduate of University of San Francisco School of Law

Family: Wife Susan Barisone, three children

and detective Elizabeth Butler were gunned down by a sexual assault suspect. Baker and Barisone sent their children to Holy Cross School, and as a detective, Baker often sought advice from Barisone.

"We really liked each other," he said, noting that colleagues also knew Butler well. "(The killings) certainly brought things into perspective."