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Private meeting request by chancellor turned down ✓

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council Tuesday voted to respond to a three-month-old letter from UC Santa Cruz Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer over a controversial proposal for an electronics park on campus.

The response says it "would be highly inappropriate" for representatives of the city to meet in private with university officials over planning policies affecting the electronics park proposal.

"These policies and procedures result from the democratic participation of thousands of our citizens over many years in an elaborate public process," states the response, drafted by Councilman Michael Rotkin and to be signed by Mayor John Laird.

"They simply cannot be scrapped because a particular developer — even one as dear to my heart as the university — finds them inconvenient."

Rotkin termed the letter "as friendly as can be," but Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams said Rotkin was acting as if the chancellor were "devious."

In a letter dated Feb. 28, Chancellor Sinsheimer had proposed that campus representatives meet with city representatives "to devise a 'land use policy' mutually agreeable to both the university and the city."

Sinsheimer had written that one way out of the controversy on the electronics park plans "would be an attempt to devise city 'land use policies' that would be mutually consistent with both the needs and interest of the university and the needs and interests of the city. If we can agree on the policies, then the issue of who, properly, has jurisdiction becomes unimportant."

The chancellor and university officials believe the university has the final authority over the electronics park proposal.

But Measure A, passed by city voters in November, tells the City Council to assert final planning authority over the high-technology development.

Some believe the controversy will ultimately be decided in court.

Rotkin, in a letter to the council, said the chancellor is attempting "secret negotiations" and "closed-door meetings" with city officials.

He also said city staff has been spending too much time answering inquiries from university representatives for technical and planning information without the knowledge of the council.

The council directed its staff Tuesday to obtain council

approval before giving any information to the university, except to answer run-of-the-mill requests.

"All letters to and contact with city staff with respect to the (electronics) facility should be treated as matters of city policy and not simply as administrative matters," said Rotkin.

The chancellor was unavailable for comment.

Councilmembers Spiro Mellis, Arnold Levine and Katy Sears-Williams continue to warn the council majority about antagonizing the chancellor and closing doors of communication between the university and the city.

"I continue to feel it is inappropriate to characterize the chancellor as somebody with devious motives," said Sears-Williams. "We develop processes not always in public meetings. I don't think that's inappropriate."

"I'm really concerned we are becoming very inflexible. He is an employee of the state, and is doing state work as he sees it."

"I think it has become a very personal kind of thing."

Replied Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt: "When you receive a letter from somebody (Sinsheimer) that says, roughly, 'I am going to do what I want to do'...I don't think any dialogue is possible."

"If the chancellor believes constitutionally he doesn't have to deal with the city, then I don't think we are in a position to deal with him."

Levine said the council majority was being "egged on by a very vocal population."

"You just can't do that nowadays."

Replied Rotkin: "We're being egged on by 72 percent of the voters." (Measure A had been passed by a 72 percent majority vote.)

But Sears-Williams maintained holding private meetings did not preclude having public meetings also.

She said Measure A was "unclear."

Councilwoman Jane Weed said Rotkin's letter to the chancellor sounded "friendly," as if it had been written by Mayor John Laird himself — known for his diplomatic approach — and not by Rotkin.

Mellis, Sears-Williams and Levine voted against sending the letter.

At Levine's suggestion, the council did agree to a vague proposal to establish a committee of council members, county supervisors and university representatives to meet in public over broad university-related issues, but not necessarily the electronics park.

Mayor Laird said he would call Sinsheimer to see if the chancellor is interested in such a committee.