

How UCSC growth deal was struck



COONERTY



BLUMENTHAL

CLUE unsatisfied but says university made concessions

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SANTA CRUZ — Two figures fresh from the front lines of battle between UC Santa Cruz and the city over campus growth say their mutual admiration and desire to bury the hatchet

paved the way to a recent pact once thought improbable.

In a wide-ranging interview Friday, Mayor Ryan Coonerty and UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal pulled back the curtain that cloaked their yearlong negotiations, which included multiple city officials, county leaders, campus staff and a citizen coalition

that remains dissatisfied with parts of the agreement they signed.

The pair described marathon meetings, sometimes reaching the early morning hours, that aimed to heal wounds dating back to the birth of the campus in the 1960s, all the while chis-

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eling through concerns about impacts of a swelling student population on the city's traffic, water, housing and general peace and quiet.

As Coonerty says, the city was less interested in limiting the university's reach than simply reducing the side effects.

Small towns and big universities are facing similar struggles nationwide as mandates to educate a growing number of students collide with municipal growth caps and Main Street opposition to the toll of a young, transient population.

But considering UCSC is Santa Cruz's largest economic engine and the city's concerns posed the biggest impediment to campus growth, Blumenthal and Coonerty, the latter of whom is up for re-election in November, had plenty of motivation to work it out.

"We were all spending money on lawyers instead of dealing with the issue," Coonerty said.

The city's legal bill to pursue lawsuits — now dropped as a result of the agreement — had reached \$1 million, Coonerty said. Blumenthal said the university's legal tab was similar.

It was Blumenthal's September 2006 appointment as chancellor that finally shook up the entrenched dynamic that existed on both sides, the mayor said. Unlike the string of outsiders that preceded Blumenthal, the affable astronomer was widely

seen as a townie who, early in his career, often crashed in the spare bedroom of Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews and her husband, Bill.

There were olive branches extended between previous chancellors and the city, but none of them grew roots.

"There was a culture of distrust on both sides," Coonerty said. "Basically, we didn't talk."

But with Santa Cruz's representatives in Sacramento — Assemblyman John Laird and Sen. Joe Simitian — well-placed on critical budget and education committees, there was a fresh push for resolution. And there was a "strong desire in the community to solve this," Coonerty said.

At a judge's urging, Blumenthal and Coonerty began working with a mediator and the other parties to tackle each sticking point.

The pair was ever mindful that the compromise had to appease a majority of 26 UC regents, a seven-member City Council, numerous county officials and nine residents who made up the Coalition for Limiting University Expansion, which had joined the city's lawsuits against the campus. Before they could get to the real issues, Coonerty said the parties had to air 30 years worth of grievances.

"It wasn't obvious to me it was going to work," Blumenthal said.

Their aides — who Coonerty said were clearly instructed "not to be obstructionists" — quibbled over definitions of "car trips," "gallons of water," "beds" and other terms that threatened to derail success.

'Not everyone got everything that they felt was justified or was positive. I think it's important to state that in some way, because these issues are not going to go away.'

JOHN AIRD, CLUE CO-FOUNDER

"Getting them to speak the same language is huge," Coonerty said.

But guided by experienced mediator Lester Levy, the two leaders began striking deals. Levy declined an interview for this story.

As a former faculty liaison to the UC Regents in the President's Office, Blumenthal also knew how to grease the skids in Oakland. Blumenthal outlined what would be non-starters for the Regents, and Coonerty, backed by his father, county Supervisor Neal Coonerty, laid out what were deal-killers for City Hall, the county and West-side residents.

"There is enough praise to go around [but] we wouldn't be sitting here today without Ryan being the mayor," Blumenthal said, attributing the deal to the younger Coonerty's openness.

Although the pair eagerly laud the university's concessions — to build new campus housing for 3,000 students, pay traffic and water fees to the city and cap enrollment of undergraduates over the next 12 years — not all parties are content.

CLUE founder Don Stevens told the Berkeley Daily Planet on Thursday that, "Even with the conservation measures in the settlement, how much growth can you have in a coastal

community? We're maxed out as a town, but the university keeps growing and growing."

Stevens promised CLUE will be vocal during reviews of campus growth plans by the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO, which are called for in the agreement. Curiously, the pact states that UCSC's willingness to apply to LAFCO should not be construed as a formal submission to the panel's authority.

"Obviously it doesn't settle all the problems," former county Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, who served as a lead negotiator for CLUE, said of the accord. "But this agreement takes the university into a position of responsibility for community impacts that is so far greater than anything they've had in the past."

CLUE co-founder John Aird said he didn't walk away feeling like he got everything he wanted, but acknowledged that is the reality of mediation.

"Not everyone got everything that they felt was justified or was positive," Aird said. "I think it's important to state that in some way, because these issues are not going to go away."

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