

Capitola city manager resigns

By DAN WHITE
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CAPITOLA — Susan Westman, the city manager who weathered the 1995 Capitola finance scandal and took office during one of the community's most turbulent times, has resigned to take a position on the Peninsula.

She announced Thursday that she would leave in mid-October to be city manager of Belmont, a community of

30,000 that is three times larger than Capitola — where she has lived for 17 years.

Belmont, near Foster City and San Carlos, is just over an hour's drive away from Capitola by car. "I'm moving there," she said. "I'm not a commuter."

Westman, 50, said she decided to make the move because she wanted to work in a larger full-service city. She called Belmont "a pretty typical Peninsula city" with a high-income residential community.

She also noted that her salary will be nearly 20 percent higher than what she earns in Capitola. She gets \$86,000 a year for her work in Capitola. She said her Belmont salary will be \$105,000 a year plus a benefit package.

In 1994, Westman, chair of the Planning Department for seven years, was selected as city manager from a nationwide pool of 208 applicants.

None of the council members seemed surprised by the announcement Thursday. Mayor Robert Garcia said he'd known about her decision for some time. "We're certainly going to miss her," he said. "She did an outstanding job."

The city has not started to look for full-time replacements but might make use of retired and highly experienced city managers interested in an interim position, Garcia said.

City officials expressed regret that she was leaving but congratulated her on a good career move. City Councilman Ron Graves reflected on her gradual rise through the ranks of Capitola government.

Graves noted that Susan Westman came to city government as a temporary housing grant coordinator, then kept working her way up. He has worked with her for almost two decades.



Westman

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"I asked the city manager if putting up with me for 16 years is driving her away," Graves said. "She assured me I had not."

Looking back on her years of service, Westman said her greatest accomplishment was bringing the city back together "under very difficult political times, by trying to give out honest, accurate information about what was going on."

She was referring to a morass of financial woes that made 1995 one of the hardest years for city government. The city was accused of misspending and mishandling municipal funds including bond money.

An investigation by the county District Attorney's Office cleared Capitola officials of criminal wrongdoing.

One of the subjects of the investigation was the misspending of more than \$2 million in funds from a bond, as well as the misuse of federal Department of Housing and Urban Development money, and the use of Redevelopment Agency funds for general city use.

Westman said the finance situation was the hardest part of her job. "The toughest part was seeing Capitola torn apart by political tur-

moil when I became city manager," she said. "Capitola is a wonderful town with wonderful people. They deserve to have issues decided on their merit rather than on pure politics."

She said Capitola is in a much better position now. "It's always difficult to leave a place like this," she said. "The majority of Capitola's problems are solved. I think Capitola's future is going to be quite bright."

Westman had high praise for the City Council. "I think they need to be complimented on all the work they've done while I've been here," she said. "I'm always impressed by their fairness and their ability to look at what is best for Capitola."