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Top-Level Session On Vince's Trees

By Ron Reeves

Sentinel Staff Writer

District Attorney Peter Chang has called a top-level meeting of county officials for this afternoon to determine if Supervisor Vincent Locatelli had grounds for knocking down three trees on the new county courthouse site.

Locatelli Friday took command of a Caterpillar and promptly proceeded to uproot a walnut, avocado and fir trees that were to be part of the permanent courthouse landscaping. His action drew vigorous protests from many people, including Dr. Carl Nelson, director of the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency, and landscape architect Robert Royston of Mill Valley.

The district attorney's telephones have been jingling all morning with calls from tree lovers who think the action was improper.

Chang today said there may be a board of supervisors' resolution authorizing removal of "at least two" of the trees and a search of board minutes and tape recordings was on today.

Chang said he definitely plans to have a talk with Locatelli, preferably before the meeting this afternoon.

He said his talk with Locatelli will determine whether or not the supervisor will be invited to the meeting.

Chang said he has notified County Administrator Carl Miller, County Counsel William Card and Tom Black, chairman of the board of supervisors, to be there, along with representatives from the public works department.

"It's an investigatory type of meeting because it seems from what information I have right now that there were many prior discussions among all the people concerned as well as an actual board resolution authorizing the removal of at least two of those trees and that Locatelli's act was based on the fact of this resolution and the discussions," Chang said.

"I'm not sure the actual manner of executing the resolution was within the normal scope of a supervisor's authority, but anybody who knows Mr. Locatelli knows that sometimes he is very direct and immediate and does things the way Henry Kaiser does them."

"We're going to have to locate the resolution, and that's what the county counsel is going to do and we will go over the tape recordings of the board proceedings."

"If it appears that in fact there were discussions and a resolution, it would also appear that Locatelli was acting in good faith and therefore wouldn't be criminally liable. If it turns out otherwise, we might have a case of malicious mischief," the district attorney stated.

Locatelli told the Sentinel removal of the walnut provided six more parking places, and he claimed the fir and the avocado were "half dead."

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