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UCSC - Research Park

Town-gown talks on boat leave the uninvited at sea

By PAUL BEATTY
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SANTA CRUZ — An on-board meeting of select local politicians with UCSC Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer to iron out differences of opinion about the proposed high-tech park at the university is making waves in the city.

The meeting happened May 24 on a sailboat owned by business and community leader Norm Lezin, a principal in Salz Tannery.

On board were City Councilmen John Laird and Spiro Mellis, County Supervisor Gary Patton and his aide, Andy Schifffrin, who is also a city planning commissioner, Sinsheimer

and his public relations man Steve Reid, Lezin and Jack Baskin.

"Jack Baskin and I had the idea," Lezin said this morning, "as we are both sympathetic to city and county concerns and with what the university is trying to do.

"We hoped such a meeting could help avoid needless polarization that hangs on rhetoric rather than on real difference."

Baskin is a builder of low-cost housing and is chairman of the UCSC Foundation, a university support group.

Laird answered the phone Thursday saying, "I was invited. I went. I wish I hadn't. I wouldn't go again, and I don't want to talk about it."

He's been taking a lot of heat from his political colleagues who weren't invited. They're not berating him publicly, but letting him know in private.

Those who were not invited were Mayor Bruce Van Allen and Councilmembers Michael Rotkin, Joseph Ghio and Mardi Wormhoudt, and as far as is known, neither was John Mahaney.

Wormhoudt says, "I not only wasn't invited, I wouldn't have gone. I have never refused to meet with anybody, but I prefer to make a distinction between business and social occasions."

Schifffrin says the meeting lacked excitement, "the boat never left the

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dock," and Mellis says it lacked class "as we had to eat Colonel Sanders' specials."

Patton says, "I've had meetings like this before, but never on a boat."

Rotkin says, "It seems to me if you're going to have a meeting like that, it ought to be in your office, if not at the City Council meeting where you can hold a public hearing.

"I don't know that much about it, except there was a meeting and they talked about the research park. From what John told me, briefly, there were no conclusions reached.

"John said he clarified his position that the city had to have a say over land-use planning . . . a meeting to see what the chancellor would settle for and what the council would be willing to accept as a process."

Testimony of everyone interviewed agree that no "business" was conducted, just an exchange of ideas.

Ghio says such meetings are a way of gathering information on public issues and anyone in office has such meetings.

"No one bothered to tell me about this one," Ghio said, "I have to find out from the press.

"It is a romantic location. The only different thing here is you have people who have more power — I don't know if that's the word: 'clout,' perhaps — all together in the boat."

Ghio adds, "It indicates where they think the power is, certainly."

Lezin says, "It wasn't possible to invite everyone because of the limitation of space and time. There was no bias in calling the meeting and there was no business conducted.

"I think folks who are seeing something frightening in this are looking for trouble."

The proposed site for the high-tech park is on 75 acres just north of Crown College.

The project is controversial both on campus and in the city. By state law, the university can proceed without city sanctions.

Tuesday, during its 7:30 p.m. session, the City Council will review a request to put a referendum on the November ballot.

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