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Capitola Candidates Cautious On Rent Issue

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A majority of the Capitola City Council candidates took cautious stands on rent control Tuesday night in the first forum leading to the April 13 election.

Former planning commissioner and local builder Robert Bucher and retired computer operator George R. Slettehaugh took stands against rent control.

Mayor Jerry Clarke, the lone incumbent running, as well as local attorney Dennis Beltram and Sunshine Eugene Gibbs, an artist and former counselor, said they would consider the issue only if certain circumstances occurred.

For Clarke, that would mean a initiative petition coming to the city.

Clarke described the city's existing mobile home park rent control ordinance as a "two aspirin headache," but supported it since it catered to mostly senior citizens. General rent control, in terms of headaches, would be a "migraine," he said.

"It could be the biggest problem the city ever dealt with," Clarke said, citing expenses and city staff time that may be incurred.

With Santa Cruz having a vote on rent control in the June 8 election, Clarke preferred to take a "wait and see" stand on how it turns out there.

Gibbs said he would consider rent control "only if residents were to come to the city complaining about high rents and say they were being forced out. If it meant going for rent control, I might go for rent control," he said.

Beltram said "fair" rent control ordinances have been the difficulty in the past. "If I could be shown one truly fair ordinance that was not disadvantageous to renters and owners, I would be open to the question," he added.

For Bucher, the city's existing mobile home rent stabilization ordinance "was as far as I can see it going."

Slettehaugh, however, was the lone candidate feeling that ordinance even went too far. He said the ordinance was one sided against park owners. "If Albertson's wants to raise its prices, it doesn't have to come to the council and ask for permission," he said. "Park owners shouldn't have to either."

Beltram also expressed concerns about the council allowing the recent condominium conversion of the 172-unit Las Flores Apartments, terming it as a "mistake. We had a large complex specifically designed for renters. I question where all these people are going to go."

Slettehaugh expressed the same concern, but Bucher argued that the city's ordinance is specific in retaining a balance of renters and homeowners. Having worked on the ordinance for two years at the Planning Commission level, Bucher maintained Las Flores met the require-

ments spelled out in the ordinance.

The traffic and parking problem, particularly to Capitola Village and surrounding neighborhoods, was another issue brought up.

A suggestion by Bucher to block off residential streets to visitor traffic on busy summer weekends proved popular from the audience.

"The shuttle bus is the best thing we have now," he said. "Let's use it and block these areas here."

Bucher and Clarke agreed that it may be time to again examine a permit parking plan for residents.

Gibbs reiterated an earlier stand to feature pedestrian access in the village, particularly on crowded summer weekends.

"It's going to get worse this summer with the wharf now open," he explained. "Perhaps we should close the village to traffic and make it a walking village on weekends."

The 41st Avenue area was another area of concern for pedestrians, according to Gibbs. In his opening statement, he expressed fear the proposed Redevelopment Agency "will perpetuate the thinking of movement with cars."

Most of the proposed improvements of the redevelopment plan, he said, is to make access easier for motorists while ignoring pedestrians.

Slettehaugh agreed that pedestrian access in the 41st Avenue area must be improved if the redevelopment plan is pursued. Like all the other candidates, he favored the related Capitola Mall expansion only if "major traffic problems" were solved.

Beltram explained that "growth and change" is going to occur. "The council's job is not to resist it, but to direct it. We have to walk a fine line in preserving what we have and allowing growth in a rational and reasonable manner," he said.

Bucher cited his concerns to retain an efficient fire department. As a commissioner for the Capitola Fire Protection District for eight years, he said many residents are unaware the fire department isn't run by the city.

A takeover of the department by the city "much in the same way the council kept our police department four years ago" is a subject Bucher favors pursuing.

Clarke pointed to the Police Department and city staff turnabout that was accomplished in his four years on the council. He wants to retain the same council majority for another four years.

"Our council has probably been the most effective governing council in the county," he said. "We never had a minority-majority split and I want to keep it that way."

The forum was sponsored by the Depot Hill Association.