

Melville Letter About Hostel At Natural Bridges Criticized

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A "Dear Mr. Cahill" letter written by Councilwoman Charlotte Melville on the development of a youth hostel at Natural Bridges State Park could get her into a peck of trouble with some irate colleagues on the Santa Cruz City Council.

State plans to build a hostel as part of a pilot program at the park last June were not approved by the council following a sometimes bitter debate before a big, hostile crowd that booed Melville several times.

The council vote was 4 to 3 against the project, with Mayor Joseph Ghio, Vice Mayor Larry Edler and Councilmen John Mahaney and Jim Hammond opposed and Melville, Bert Muhly and Carole DePalma for it.

But in a letter dated Dec. 1 on the city's official stationery and in her announced role as city council member, Melville calls for help from Russell Cahill, director of the state Parks and Recreation Department, in the development of a new master plan for the Natural Bridges State Park so that the youth hostel project can go forward.

Mahaney displayed the letter to the council and questioned it

should have been written by Melville as other than a private citizen.

"I'm sometimes in the minority on council decisions and maybe I don't like it but the majority rules and the decision has to be supported," Mahaney said.

Mahaney agreed to table the potentially hot issue until Melville, who was absent, can be present to hear further discussion.

But Ghio said he did not think it proper for Melville to have written the letter on official stationery and using her city title.

Technically, the state can go ahead and build the hostel regardless of the council's opposition to it. This is because the state does not come under council jurisdiction on state-owned property.

The project aroused strong opposition from area residents last June.

But Melville divulged in her letter that the state is proceeding with the project, saying:

"I had hoped to talk with you for a few minutes about the development of the hostel program. The pilot program includes a hostel for the Natural Bridges State Park in Santa

Cruz and the building is being designed by the state architect's office in conjunction with the local hostel society for which I am a board member."

Melville is also member of a state advisory committee responsible for designation of hostel sites in the city and county.

Last June her battling for the hostel project she had helped to put together here for state consideration was interpreted by some opponents as "a moral conflict of interest."

The hostel will be one of 12 in two networks of hostels to be built by the state to provide decent shelter at low prices for travelers. The one here would be part of a six-hostel chain between Monterey and San Francisco and would be open year-round.

Funding for the total project is coming from AB 400, a state bill to finance the pilot program. The hostel planned here has an estimated \$235,000 price tag.

Before last June's bitter debate was over, Melville told the crowd of opponents in the council chamber: "I resent the fact you sit out there and boo me for doing my job."

