

City manager pulls surprise: To quit Feb. 1

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

Catching virtually everyone at City Hall by surprise, City Manager Jim Buell Monday announced that he will resign Feb. 1.

Buell, who has held the city's top job for two and a half years, said he was leaving to become a consultant to real estate developers.

Several City Council members contacted this morning expressed shock at Buell's decision.

"I darn near dropped," said Councilwoman Betty Murphy. "There was no inkling that he was considering leaving."

Buell dropped by Mayor Bill Johnston's house last night to give him the news, and the mayor dropped off Buell's resignation letter to the rest of the council.

"His (the mayor's) mouth was hanging open," Buell said this morning, laughing.

Buell is recommending that Assistant City Manager John Radin, an 18-year City Hall veteran, be given the manager's post.

Buell today praised Radin as "very competent," saying that they have enjoyed a "good relationship."

Three years ago, after City Manager Ron Bartels was fired by the council on a 4-3 vote, some council members pushed hard to give Radin the job. But the council eventually decided to give the job to Buell. Only Councilman Frank Osmer voted against hiring him.

Buell came to Watsonville from Bakersfield, where he was assistant city manager. He had also served as a director of a solid-waste management project in Washington, D.C. and before that was an administrative analyst for the city of Burbank.

Buell said today that he had mixed emotions about leaving the public sector, although he pointed out that he will continue to work with government agencies in his work as a consultant.

From his experience in government, he said, he has learned that "many developers don't know how to handle the politics of communities." And, he said, "there is no one who offers that kind of advice and service." His consulting business, he added, will help meet that need.

Buell said he already has lined up several consulting contracts, which he will carry out after he leaves City Hall.



JIM BUELL
Moving along

His relationship with the City Council has been generally smooth, although at times he has tangled with the feisty Frank Osmer. In the past several months, however, the friction between him and Osmer has been greatly reduced.

Buell said he saw the council "as a good one to work with. He said individual differences have surfaced from time to time, but that "collectively this is the best council I've ever worked for."

Buell's nadir during his administration occurred in January when he was suspended by the council for a week for taking \$115 worth of packing material from the basement of City Hall.

In taking the action, however, most council members expressed sympathy for Buell, who at the time was going through a divorce. (The city manager had needed the packing material to move household items for his estranged wife from the Pajaro Valley to Southern California.)

The accomplishments of his administration, Buell said, include the adoption of a modern new zoning ordinance, "seeing downtown revitalization plans really begin to take hold," and departmental reorganizations which have resulted in great effi-

ciency and communication among the city staff.

Aside from the packing material incident, Buell sees few basic flaws in his administration, although sometimes he feels he could have pushed harder for downtown redevelopment.

Buell has seen the council turn from an essentially "pro-growth" to a "controlled growth" body, which Buell feels is mostly for the good.

"Now we take each housing subdivision on its own merit," said Buell.

The 39-year-old Buell said he will continue to live in Watsonville, saying he had no desire to return to his native Southern California. For a while, he said, he will work out of his home, but eventually hopes to open an office in San Jose.

Council members this morning — both on and off the record — said they were generally pleased with Buell's performance, although some said he apparently had trouble adjusting to political life in a small town. (Buell himself admitted that in an interview with the Register-Paronian on his one-year anniversary in Watsonville.)

"He's been generally good," said Councilman Frank Osmer.

Councilman Charles Palmtag this morning said he "can understand someone wanting to get out of the business."

He said the past years have "been hectic — with all of us pushing their pet projects . . . and going from crisis to crisis." "He's had a tough job," said Palmtag. "I sympathize with him."

The bets are that Radin has enough support on the council to get the manager's post. But council members were cautious this morning when asked whether they will vote for him.

Mrs. Murphy said the mayor had told her the council would hold a personnel session in a few weeks to decide whether to "advertise" for a new manager — or whether to just hire Radin.

Radin said this morning that he would take the post if offered, "but nobody's offered it so far."

REFERENCE