

Woman finds politics a bitter pill to swallow

By JOAN RAYMOND
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SCOTTS VALLEY — Dori Bahr doesn't consider herself a political person.

For 15 years, she and her husband, Tom, have operated the Carbonero Creek Travel Trailer Park. It's a nest of trailers that has become permanent, low-cost housing for about 80 residents.

The trailer city hasn't lost its cozy appeal despite the growing industry that surrounds and overshadows it.

The trailer park was thrown into the political arena recently and Mrs. Bahr got a taste of politics that, to her, was like discovering an anchovy inside a bite of chocolate ice cream.

At issue was whether the park's 15-year permit, which expired last year and was to be reviewed by planning commissioners, would be renewed and for how long. Commissioners decided to renew the permit for another 15 years to the delight of the Bahrs.

What upset Mrs. Bahr, however, was comments made by City Councilwoman Barbara Leichter prior to the meeting at which the planning commission made its decision.

Those comments, said Mrs. Bahr, "smacked of pre-decision;" slandered "everybody in city government, every solitary one;" damaged the trailer park's business and damaged the Bahrs' credibility with tenants.

At a recent meeting, public officials and city staff listened to Mrs. Bahr's concerns. At the meeting were City Administrator Bob Rockett, Mayor Rey Retzlaff, Planning Commission Chairman Hal Medo, former mayor Friend Stone, public works director Jack Elzer and the Bahrs' planning consultant, Jun Lee. Lee and Elzer are at odds with Leichter over Elzer's plan to rezone his property.

Mrs. Bahr focused on a comment allegedly made by Leichter to Fred Cummings, an eight-year resident of the trailer park. Cummings said the comment was made prior to the planning commission decision on the permit during a telephone conversation between Leichter and Cummings.

Cummings, an assembler in a local electronics plant, is this year's chairman of the committee for Scotts Valley Days, the city's annual celebration that attracts visitors from throughout the county. He is a past president of Santa Cruz County REACT and member of the Valley Communications Network — two organizations for CB and ham radio operators who help citizens in emergencies.

In a written statement delivered to the planning commission by the Bahrs, Cummings said he had telephoned Leichter about his concerns over stop signs on Scotts Valley Drive. During the conversation, Cummings told Leichter he lived in the trailer park.

"The Councilperson's response to this was, 'You had better be looking for a place to live, rather than being worried about new stop signs,'" said Cummings.

Leichter has denied she made this comment. But Cummings said, "I would dispute it face to face with the lady."

After talking with Leichter, continued Cummings, "I was left with the definite impression that there was pressure afoot to close the park, by persons unnamed. And that I was in imminent danger of having to move."

Cummings told the Sentinel, "I called her up on a totally disconnected matter. That's why what she said landed like a bomb shell in my lap." He said he "seriously considered" moving, and wondered "if the park did close down, would I be forced to sell my trailer and get rid of my dog?"

He said it would have been hard to find a space in the county for his trailer, not only because parks are crowded, but because the trailer is extra wide.

Also, said Cummings, he told another resident, Jeanette Miller, about Leichter's comments in the presence of a prospective park tenant.

Miller said in a written statement the prospective tenant, after hearing the comments, "of course did not stay."

"The point I want to stress is Barbara Leichter is responsible for discontent," wrote Miller.

Cummings said Leichter's comments had "left me with a deep concern about my immediate future."

Also, he said he was "displeased with the fact that I lost Dori and Tom a customer...I have steered many a customer to them."

Leichter made the comment to Cummings, said Mrs.

"I don't want her taking credit for something she had nothing to do with...what she was trying to indicate...is that by golly, she was going to be the knightess on the white horse, galloping over to the park just to save everybody and to swoop them up on her horse and be the savior of it all."

According to Mrs. Bahr, Leichter said she had convinced Planning Commissioner Charles Hoover to talk Planning Commission Chairman Hal Medo into extending the permit.

"Nobody convinced anybody of anything," said Medo.

Bahr, even though the planning commission had yet to make a decision on the permit.

"It had not gone before the planning commission. It had not gone before the council. And here was a councilwoman making a statement that smacked of pre-decision straight from city staff, planning commission and council. This is wrong, and made me furious because it put a blight in my thinking, and Tom's — that everyone in this city government is crooked, and that is not true," said Mrs. Bahr.

Also, said Mrs. Bahr, Leichter made comments to the effect the planning staff was not on the side of the trailer park residents.

Mrs. Bahr said Leichter told her the staff had "only" recommended the permit be extended for one year.

Mrs. Bahr said she told Leichter this was standard procedure for the staff.

According to Mrs. Bahr, Leichter told her, "No, no, no, no, no." It was not standard procedure...But it is!"

Rockett confirmed the staff had followed the correct procedure based on the advice of the city attorney.

"If (Leichter) did not even know that, then who's to say that she can be counted credible in anything else she says. I am tired of this garbage dumping out of her mouth without some kind of backing up and proof of it. I don't intend to see one woman or one set of people run roughshod over a fine city like this," Mrs. Bahr said.

Also, it upset Mrs. Bahr that Leichter told Cummings she would come and talk to tenants at the park.

"She had no right to step foot on here. This is private property. If she wanted to come over by invitation, that's fine. I don't mind anyone talking to the tenants, but I do mind someone coming in and scaring them to death."

Even if the planning commission had voted to kill the permit, said Mrs. Bahr, state regulations would give longterm residents at least a one year grace period before

having to move.

Commented Jack Kerin, chief of the codes and standards division for the state department of Housing and Community Development, "It's very rare a use permit would not be renewed where you have a number of families living there."

After the planning commission decision, Mrs. Bahr said Leichter called and congratulated her on the permit and tried to take credit for obtaining the permit.

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Mrs. Bahr said Leichter acts "as some sort of an efficiency expert whose job it is to find what's wrong with everything. Well fine. But I don't think she's missed a tidbit."

Mayor Retzlaff commented Leichter "by far" spends more time than any other councilmember at her job, "but it is unfortunate the time is not spent in a more positive or productive way, because I feel, at this point she is being almost totally ineffective as a councilperson, at least in my opinion as to what a councilperson should be."

Added Rockett, "There's no doubt she is a very intense, creative, intelligent and active human being. And if she can come to work with the other members of the council, I think there would be a strong council, if it could work together as a team."

Concluded Mrs. Bahr, "I'm sure she means well. She just doesn't know what well is."

Repeated attempts by The Sentinel to interview Leichter for comment on the issue were unsuccessful.

Doctors will volunteer services to screen junior high students

Local orthopedic doctors will volunteer time to screen junior high school students for scoliosis, or spinal curvature, at Watsonville Community Hospital Feb. 23 from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

The screening is a follow-up to screening done by school nurses. Scoliosis is not a disease or illness, but a condition in which the spine grow in an S-shaped curve rather than straight. It can be corrected with a back brace in some cases, or by surgery.

Parents are asked to accompany their children to the screening, where referrals will be made.

25¢* COFFEE BREAK.

