

Enraged citizen says he's 'not afraid to go to jail and fight for what's right'

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When Bill Seymour calls up the county about his building permit, it's like a re-run from the movie "Network" with all those frustrated citizens screaming out their windows that they're "mad as hell and can't take it anymore."

"I may be over 50, but I'm not afraid to go to jail and fight for what I think is right," proclaims Seymour with the diplomacy of a pit bulldog.

What Seymour is ready to fight about is a building permit — or lack of one — for the repair of storm damage on his Alta Via Road house in Brookdale.

The house sits on a steep slope surrounded by tall trees. In the fierce storms of January, a tree had fell, taking off one bedroom and prying loose the kitchen from the rest of the residence. A sliding glass door was destroyed and windows broken. A car owned by Seymour's tenant, Monty McKissock, now hangs over the edge of a cliff.

The kitchen needs to be rebuilt and a roof redone. Seymour says he will forget about trying to rebuild the lost bedroom. The house next door has been reduced to

a pile of rubble and splintered boards, lying in the thick shade of the towering redwoods.

Seymour says he had visited the property several times after the winter storms, but did not start repair work until August when the weather was more favorable.

He did not obtain a building permit, because he says he was under the impression that permits were not needed for storm damaged residences.

As a result, a county building inspector placed a stop work order on the property a few weeks ago and the permit will not be issued until Seymour obtains a geological report at his own expense to determine the stability of the site.

County building officials and Fred Keeley, the aide to County Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, have spent some time going over the permit matter with Seymour.

However, Seymour maintains county officials led him to believe there would be no problem with the permit, then reneged on that decision.

Keeley, on the other hand, said Seymour — whether intentionally or not — had withheld pertinent information from the county.

Keeley had intervened in the matter on behalf of Seymour, but negotiations broke down later when Seymour placed an irate phone call to Keeley's residence in the morning hours before work.

Seymour told Keeley he "had had enough" and wanted to ask Keeley about delays in getting the permit.

According to Seymour, he told the supervisor's aide, "I'm the boss. I'm the one who signs your paycheck and don't you ever forget it."

Keeley recalled he was awakened by a "very upset" Seymour. He said he told Seymour it was "inappropriate" to make such a home phone call.

Seymour maintained Keeley should "expect prank calls."

Keeley was not the only public official called by Seymour. The property owner also said he placed calls to the office of State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and even to Gov. Brown's office. His notes show he spent about an hour one morning on the phone to Sacramento.

Seymour is still without a permit, however, and maintains he will not pay a geologist "to tell me this hill may or may not come down this winter."

He says he will deduct \$15 off his tax bill for every hour he has spent wrangling with the county.

Keeley "regret(s) the communication has broken down, but we have no interest in keeping him from rebuilding, as long as it is in a safe and legal manner.... This office isn't in the business of waiving and breaking rules, but in helping (constituents)."

If there is one thing that both Seymour and Keeley agree on, it is that Seymour is not the typical customer.

What does Seymour want?

"I want my damn permit, if I have to have it. Then I want to sell and get out of Santa Cruz County."

He added: "I'm from the old school. I believe if you're right, you fight for it. If you're wrong, apologize to people who you have come down heavy on."

Seymour lived in the Brookdale house for several years before moving to the Los Angeles area. The mortgage is almost paid off, he said.

In the meantime, a fresh growth of redwoods has sprouted atop the stumps where Seymour cut down the trees that he said were rubbing against the house after the January storms.

The neighbors complained, he said, "so I told them, 'if you want to buy my house, you can keep the trees.'"



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Bill Seymour's house in Brookdale, damaged in the January storm.