

Wandering and Wondering

By John Maybury *Pacifica Tribune San Jose Mercury News*

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KEEP PACIFICA PEACEFUL

Since I last wrote about my loyal reader who calls himself "Sleepless in Paradise," he has continued grappling with his "neighbor from hell" issues: noise, litter, blight, invasion of privacy, and other city code violations. But "Sleepless" has found existing city ordinances to be mostly useless in enforcing the law and protecting himself and his family. Once again, a bully and a scofflaw is "getting away with murder" because no one in the city, including the police, seems to have sufficient legal grounds to pursue the bad guy and enforce the law. This is a sad state of affairs for a little beach town that has (or used to have) a reputation for being neighborly, friendly, laid-back, low-key, mellow, live-and-let-live, etc. I sympathize with "Sleepless"; I know how frustrating it is. In my 20 years here in Pacifica, I have survived my share of nuisance neighbors. "Sleepless" and I are starting a grassroots effort to defend the rights of Pacificans who want peace and quiet in paradise. I encourage you to talk to City Hall about beefing up our anemic laws to protect our quality of life. To join this crusade, write a letter to the editor of this newspaper. Contact your City Council members and your new city manager Lori Tinfow. And email me your name and contact information (mayburrito@goofbuster.com).

HEAT ON HARBOR COMMISSION

John Ullom of Citizen Access TV writes: "On Wednesday, February 5, the Harbor Commission will vote to destroy documents. With the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury currently investigating the Harbor District, I think that destruction would be inappropriate and suspicious. I'm asking for your help in encouraging the commissioners to vote NO. The documents include canceled checks, resolutions, agendas, minutes, litigation and other records that the Grand Jury might need. The public learned of the investigation very recently and the General Manager requested the destruction soon after. This action fits a pattern described in the Half Moon Bay Review (hmbreview.com). Please contact all five harbor commissioners at smharbor.com and ask them not to destroy the records. Commissioner Sabrina Brennan's website (sabinabrennan.com/commission) has useful news items on the harbor district and grand jury." (The harbor district includes Pillar Point Harbor in El Granada and Oyster Point Marina/Park in South San Francisco. Get more background at fixourharbors.com.)

NO TOWER ON THE ROCK

Norina Tang posted on NextDoor.com's Rockaway Beach site (edited for clarity and space): "I am writing to provide an update on The Rock. Last October, I received a notice about a proposed development on The Rock (the hill between Fassler Avenue, Sea Bowl Lane, and Highway 1). The proposal was for a mixed-use development consisting of two buildings with 20,000-plus square feet of commercial space and 63 condominium units (two to three bedrooms each). The notice mentioned a study session with the Pacifica Planning Commission on this topic in one week. After receiving the notice, I put together a petition opposing this development. With the help and support of many Pacificans, we quickly gathered 75+ signatures on the petition. Many also attended the study session, resulting in a record turnout for such a meeting. Since then, Todd Bray has spoken to the owner/developer Guru Thalapeneni, and I have spoken to our State Assemblyman Kevin Mullin and Pacifica Mayor Mary Ann Nihart. I am happy to report

that for now it appears that Guru is dropping his proposed development and that no future proposals are on the table. We are safe for the time being! Yippee! Thank you all for your help and support on this matter, which will undoubtedly help preserve the beauty and quality of life we all enjoy here in Pacifica. I will keep you posted about any future proposed development of The Rock. If another unsuitable proposal is on the table, I hope I can count on you again for your support in opposition to it."

BUILD GREEN

The Sustainable Building Advisor Program (sbaprogram.com) in San Francisco began a new term January 24. Pacifica architect and author Ann Edminster is academic chair and head instructor.

CITY COUNCIL IN A COFFEEHOUSE

Would your community be better off if your city council met at the local Starbucks? The answer is almost certainly yes. Walk into a council chamber or school board meeting room in your town, and you'll likely see rows of chairs facing some sort of raised dais or stage, where the council members or board members sit. Essentially, city council chambers are laid out like church, and, as in church, you're not supposed to talk too much. So it's not surprising that fewer and fewer Americans bother to go to city council meetings (or, for that matter, to church). So where do people go? They go to places where they feel comfortable, where they can eat and drink and talk. ...Ask yourself if the following sounds like how public meetings are conducted in your community: The big decisions are made in closed session, and when the council or board members face a difficult issue in public, they spend most of the time sniping at one another. The written agendas handed out are long and hard to understand. Turnout among citizens is low, unless something has made the public mad and so many angry people show up that it's impossible to conduct a useful meeting. And those who come to speak tend to be regulars, many of them nutty gadflies, whom the council tunes out. (They prove the municipal wisdom that that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who don't go to council meetings, and those who go and probably shouldn't.) In my experience as a reporter, meaningful conversations between citizens do sometimes take place during meetings, but this talk occurs in corners, just outside the chambers in the hallway, or in common space. ...Take out the old fixed benches and seating of your council chamber. Set up tables and chairs and nice couches. Have a bar for serving coffee and healthy snacks and maybe even beer and wine. ...And then take the council or board members off the dais and put them in a corner of the chambers -- the way you might position a piano player in a hotel lobby. Ideally, they'd be miked just loud enough for anyone in the room to hear, but not so loud as to overwhelm people's conversations. ...Too many of us treat local government as if it were a civic religion requiring highly regulated, church-like public gatherings. So we should loosen up. California is way too interesting to have its public meetings governed by stuffy Yankee mores. Imagine grabbing a drink, putting your feet up, and tuning out the re-zoning hearing in the corner while you and your neighbor trade gossip, and maybe figure out how to turn that vacant lot into a community garden." (Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square. This column appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle "Insight" section on January 19.)

SWAMI SEZ

"Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak."

SAVE WATER

Governor Brown has declared a drought emergency. Our water district says: shorter showers, reduce water use in home and garden, and use commercial car washes instead of your garden hose. Google "water conservation" for more ideas.

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