

Mall war front shifts to San Ramon

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THERE ARE NO coincidences, right?

Consider these developments in San Ramon related to its partnership with Sunset Development to build a new city center and high-end shopping mall downtown:

- Stockton attorney Steven Herum filed a public records act request in November with San Ramon seeking all documents related to the project. Herum does not identify his client.
- A Web site, www.SanRamonTribune.com, contains highly critical articles about San Ramon's actions related to the City Center project. The site does not contain, however, the author's name and its unknown creator intentionally acted to remain anonymous through the use of a domain proxy service.
- Jim Brennan, a San Ramon resident with no record of civil involvement, signed a Jan. 13 letter criticizing the City Council. He objected to the council's decision to ratify via the consent calendar City Manager Herb Moniz' signature in early November approving a two-year extension of the city's deal with Sunset Development.
- Miller Starr Regalia, a law firm whose partner is the husband of former Walnut Creek City Councilwoman Gwen Regalia, sent a letter on Thursday to San Ramon stating that it represents Brennan and a group calling itself Citizens for City Center Disclosure. The 11-page document contends that the city broke the law when it ratified its deal with Sunset after the someone is putting the heat on San Ramon.

For the most likely culprit, look north toward Walnut Creek.

A secret financier sponsored a ballot referendum late last year in Walnut Creek that called for the repeal of an approval for a three-story Neiman Marcus in downtown Broadway Plaza.

Macerich, which owns Broadway Plaza, subsequently redesigned the project and seeks approval of a scaled-down project.

But now, the unnamed opponents to the Plaza expansion plans are working on their second phase: A citywide growth-control ballot initiative.

As for the why, proponents of the Walnut Creek project strongly suspect that Sunset Development and a competing mall company, Taubman, are behind the stealth campaign.

Mehran has denied any involvement and Taubman won't talk.

But Mehran has played in Walnut Creek's political sandbox before.

State regulators fined Mehran \$9,000 after he failed to disclose his involvement in Walnut Creek's 1990 election. Mehran secretly sponsored mailers opposing Measure G, which would have relaxed growth controls in the city.

Regardless of the identities of these undisclosed enemies, this brewing mall war would well spill into this year's San Ramon election where Mayor Abram Wilson and councilmen Jim Livingston and Dave Hudson are up for re-election.

Wilson says he is not worried about either his political future or the heightened scrutiny.

"We have nothing to hide and we are very comfortable with all the decisions we have made," Wilson said. "Our residents are much too intelligent to let outside forces serve to the detriment of San Ramon."

Either way, the message behind this sudden interest in San Ramon's city center project seems crystal clear: If you screw with our project, we'll screw with yours.

This oughta be fun.

GOT BLOG? Read Politics Blotter at www.ibabuzz.com/politics for a few post-inaugural tales such as:

- Cell phones took a hit. Someone stole Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover's phone. Saint Mary's College government affairs director Tim Farley lost his cell phone in the crush. And Ken Kilday of Martinez left his phone at the San Francisco Airport.
- At least Farley still had his phone when he needed it most. Early Tuesday morning, a shopping center next door to his hotel caught on

fire, smoke poured in and the power went out. He had to evacuate using his cell phone as a flashlight.

- Contra Costa political consultant Tom Koch made a key observation: Standing on newsprint helps insulate your feet from the cold ground. Here is yet another reason why newspapers must not die.

AND FINALLY: You have to see to believe the video posted on our politics blog of Contra Costa Assessor Gus Kramer in drag.

Kramer says he and the other department heads agreed to "humiliate themselves" as entertainment to the staff for a December 1999 holiday party.

They achieved their goal.

I have to say, though, Gus has pretty good legs.

But he absolutely must consult a fashion expert the next time he cross-dresses.

The dress was way, way too short. The shoes are hideous. I hope that hairpiece has been burned. And I won't even talk about the stockings.

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