

Backers of recall notify council

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By Tom Lochner

Former Pinole Mayor Betty Boyle delivered notices of intention for a recall of three City Council members this week, to the applause of a gallery specked with blue-on-white "Recall" T-shirts.

The notices, which are individualized but contain common elements, chastise Mayor Maria Alegria and Councilmen David Cole and Stephen Tilton for their "termination" of former City Manager Belinda Espinosa and their "suspect" personal relationship with Pear Street Bistro owner Gary Wong.

"You have acted with arrogant impunity against the majority will of the people and the city staff," all three notices read.

Public speakers Tuesday voiced more generalized disapproval of the three council members.

"Trust is a hard thing to gain," said resident Bill Miller, paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln. "When you have lost it, you have lost everything.

"We have lost our trust in you."

Alegria, Cole and Tilton voted May 14 not to renew Espinosa's contract. That decision came down less than a month after the council authorized a city purchase of the bistro building for the city-commissioned appraisal of \$1.55 million — about half the \$3 million price Wong's accountant had proposed in an e-mail to Alegria in January. Subsequent e-mails between Wong, his accountant and city officials show Wong's frustration with Espinosa's method of valuing his building.

Wong received more than \$500,000 in city redevelopment loans from 2001 to 2003. His loan balance was about \$439,000 when he stopped making loan payments 20 months ago.

Wong did not return a call Wednesday; he has said in the past he cannot comment until the loan situation is resolved.

The notices also accuse the three council members of jeopardizing public safety by "removing" Fire Chief Jim Parrott from his command at the cusp of the fire season by making him

acting city manager. Parrott is still fire chief, but taking on the additional duties of acting city manager, which he did June 1, will require delegating some fire-related operational tasks, he has said.

The notice to Alegria accuses her of a personal vendetta against Espinosa and of violating the city's ethics code. Accusations against Cole include filing false financial documents with the state Fair Political Practices Commission; Cole has filed amended forms for three years. Tilton is accused of offensive public behavior that included uttering an obscenity at the Hercules farmers market May 5.

Alegria said Wednesday that the recall effort is "politics of the personal taken too far."

"We shouldn't be penalized for making tough decisions," she said. "We stop being

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good leaders when we allow ourselves to be intimidated. I think the citizens of Pinole are smart and will see it for what it is: personal politics.”

Cole did not return a call seeking comment Wednesday. Earlier this week, commenting on a possible recall, he said, “I serve at the will of the people.”

Tilton, during a break in Tuesday’s meeting, said nothing in the notice aimed at him is grounds for a recall and that he might challenge it on legal grounds.

He said some language in the petition reflects matters that were discussed in closed session and therefore must have been leaked; he said he could not specify the language because that would violate closed-session confidentiality.

Tilton characterized as “fictitious language” the obscenity he is accused of using in Hercules.

“I never said anything like that,” he said. “I have never uttered any words like that in my life.”

“To recall me is reaching,” Tilton said. “Like David Cole said, I serve at the will of the people. I won’t allow myself to be recalled on a petition that’s full of lies and with no legal basis.”

County elections officials said Wednesday that they could find nothing in the state Elections Code that would limit what is “valid” grounds for a recall.

A recall election would require petitions signed by 25 percent of Pinole’s almost 9,000 registered voters, or about 2,250 signatures.

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