

# Internal Affairs: A recruiting panel or a chat with old friends

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When the San Jose city manager's office earlier this year went to fill a new, high-paying job in intergovernmental relations, former Mayor **Ron Gonzales'** chief of staff made the list of finalists. But questions arose about whether **Rebecca Dishotsky** got a little help from her friends on the recruitment panel.

City officials grew so concerned about favoritism in the process that they applied the brakes and reopened the position, which would pay up to about \$120,000 a year.

**Pete Furman**, chief of staff for Mayor **Chuck Reed**, confirmed reports that the committee seeking to fill the job noticed "that folks in the résumé pool whose résumés looked interesting didn't make the list" of finalists. The committee also noticed "the fact that there was more than one personal friend of hers on the interview panel."

Some sources said the former chief of staff did so well on a questionnaire for the job that it seemed she'd been given the questions ahead of time - something Dishotsky emphatically denies.

"Yes, I knew almost everyone on the panel," Dishotsky said, "but by no stretch of the imagination did I get questions in advance. I was treated just like everyone else."

Dishotsky said her jobs with Gonzales and previously in Washington, D.C., involved a lot of intergovernmental relations work, and those experiences prepared her well for the position. "It naturally fit my skill set," Dishotsky said.

However, she said she decided in March that she wanted to take an offer from PayPal, where she now works as an internal communications manager, rather than wait to see if she got the city job. "I pretty much made up my mind to go in another direction, to go into the private sector."

The new city position, meanwhile, remains unfilled.

Time's a-wastin'

Opponents of a proposed San Francisco 49ers football stadium in Santa Clara were miffed after the last city council meeting. When one of their comrades wanted to weigh in during the public comment session, Mayor **Patricia Mahan** muttered, "You're wasting your time."

Stadium opponent **Michele Ryan** wrote in an e-mail to IA that she feared the mayor was "creating a climate that will discourage others from coming forward to speak."

A video clip of the comment, posted on YouTube, is barely audible. But Mahan doesn't deny saying it.

"That's a big step for me. You haven't made it until you made it on YouTube," she joked.

There is a simple explanation, she added. The person who wanted to comment didn't step up to the microphone quickly enough and was wasting the three minutes allowed.

"I was saying, 'Come on, now is the time to come up. You're wasting your time.'" Mahan explained.

Mahan added if she hadn't been open to listening, "I would have said you're wasting *our* time."

A developer's gift

When the Santa Clara City Council last month weighed a controversial proposal to build housing on the city's last 17 acres of farmland, the debate stretched into the early morning hours. Partway through the meeting, SummerHill Homes, one of the developers, announced a \$200,000 gift to help the city fix streets in the South of Forest neighborhood near the farmland.

Was it a bribe? That's a question some opponents of the project asked after the city council OK'd the proposal.

Former Santa Clara Mayor **Judy Nadler**, who's now senior fellow in ethics at Santa Clara University, agreed the timing could give an impression - rightly or wrongly - that SummerHill was hoping to influence the council's decision.

But city leaders said they negotiated the contribution based on neighborhood needs, something it does for many development projects. Some would say the city's job, ultimately, is to work out the best deal for any given project and that the city is savvy, not slimy, for negotiating additional funds.

And it's common for cities to ask developers to help build infrastructure or to include a park in their plans. In San Jose, for instance, developers recently offered more than \$167 million for road improvements and community projects in exchange for the right to build thousands of new homes in the Evergreen district. Even that wasn't enough money for the San Jose City Council, which turned the deal down.

So hey, maybe SummerHill got off easy. Either that or Santa Clara's a cheap date.

That's classified

With all the censor's marks and blacked-out information, local residents might have thought they were looking at CIA documents, Pentagon war plans or **Dick Cheney's** Christmas list.

But the top-secret passages came instead in documents about water. More specifically, they were in the letters of intent from 17 people who wanted to be considered for the Santa Clara Valley Water District's open board seat representing northern Santa Clara County.

This was the seat made vacant last month when water district Chief Executive **Stan Williams** appointed former board member **Greg Zlotnick** to a newly created, \$184,000-a-year job at the district - without advertising the position.

But if the ensuing controversy has taught district honchos anything about the risks of secrecy, IA sure doesn't see it. When the district posted the application letters on its Web site, blacked out were the addresses and phone numbers of the applicants.

District spokeswoman **Susan Siravo** said that's because state law doesn't allow agencies to post such information on the Internet, lest folks be harassed. But a closer look finds the district went Sharpie Crazy, blacking out the addresses and phone numbers of San Jose State University's Environmental Studies Department, attorneys' letterhead, even the addresses and phone numbers of organizations like the Silicon Valley Mediation Group and Clontech Labs, which are readily available in the phone book or online.

"Our clerk's office wanted to get the information on the Web site as quickly as possible," said Siravo. "Perhaps they were overly careful. I don't think they had any intention of being secretive."

Trouble is, there is no law that allows the censor's marks.

Section 6254.21 of the state government code says, "No state or local agency shall post the home address or telephone number of any elected or appointed official on the Internet without first obtaining the written permission of that individual."

"It doesn't cover applicants," said longtime First Amendment lawyer **Terry Francke** of Sacramento. "This is just stupid."

After IA raised questions, the district called back the applicants, only six of whom gave the OK to uncensor the info. Siravo noted the documents are public to anyone who goes to the district offices.

IA's opinion? If we told you, we'd have to kill you.

Internal Affairs is compiled by Mercury News staff. This week's items were written by Joshua Molina, Julie Patel and Paul Rogers. Send tips to [internalaffairs@mercurynews.com](mailto:internalaffairs@mercurynews.com) or call (408) 271-3638.

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