Montecito Planning Commission

Brianda Negrete Public Comment - A-27

LATE DIST

From: esque13@aol.com
Sent: Friday, January 20, 2023 1:22 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Letter to Board of Supervisors for 1/24/23 meeting
Attachments: Board of Supervisors Letter.docx

Categories: Public Comment

Dear Clerk of the Board:
Please find attached and copied below a letter that I would like to have circulated to the members of the Board of Supervisors in regard to Administrative item #A-27 on their meeting Agenda for January 24, 2023.
Please confirm receipt. Thank you very much.
Susan Keller

Board of Supervisors

County of Santa Barbara
RE: A-27) Consider recommendations regarding the removal of Susan Keller from the Montecito Planning Commission

Dear Supervisors:

I have served on the Montecito Planning Commission (MPC) for the past 8-1/2 years. Furthermore, I was a member of the committee that worked with Naomi Schwartz in the year 2002 to formulate the Bylaws of the MPC, so I have an in-depth knowledge of the purpose and function of the MPC and the obligations of the commissioners. I have consistently and faithfully fulfilled these responsibilities, which specifically include upholding the Montecito Community Plan and respecting the Montecito Architectural Guidelines. The stated reason for the request by Supervisor Williams for my removal from the MPC is "to facilitate a full complement of commissioners and to allow other individuals in the Montecito community to serve on the MPC." However, I have found the actions leading up to this request for my removal to be so objectionable and damaging to the credibility of the institution, that I feel obligated to bring the following to your attention, to go on record, and to speak publicly about what has occurred.

Supervisor Williams called me on Dec. 27th and offered me a position on the Historic Landmarks Advisory Committee. I gave this my consideration but notified him by email on Dec. 28th that I preferred to remain on the MPC instead, to complete my current term, and then to retire at the end of the year. I left that day to go on a trip out of the country where there was no Internet reception. Supervisor Williams texted me while I was still away to say I needed to call him on an urgent basis. I arranged to do so, and he then told me that two other commissioners had said they would resign from the MPC if I were to be elected Chair this coming year, a position that I was looking forward to filling, given my position as 1st Vice Chair for 2022. I felt that my previous experience chairing the MPC in 2017 as well as chairing the County Women's Commission put me in a good position to restore some of the decorum, structure, and formality of our MPC meetings that had deteriorated during the past 2-1/2 years of online meetings.

I asked Supervisor Williams the basis for their position and objections, and he gave me several vague reasons, referencing my lack of deference to the decisions of the Montecito Board of Architectural Review and my tendency to ask many questions, which contributed to lengthy meetings. Given the charge of the MPC to be decision-makers with input from but not necessarily agreement with the MBAR and given the importance of making well-informed and thoroughly explored decisions, I felt that these were not valid criticisms. I believe I have consistently followed the practices intended by the creation and existence of the MPC. However, Supervisor Williams also mentioned that there had been some criticism of me from the Planning Department, and I felt that this issue did need to be explored and resolved. I closed our

conversation by telling him that – rather than put him in the middle of this dispute – I would reach out to the other commissioners, asking them to meet one-on-one, to discuss their concerns, to find common ground. He agreed with this. I also intended to contact the Planning Department.

I emailed those commissioners upon my return home, and they each responded by refusing to meet with me and making almost-identical and off-subject statements about it being the supervisor's sole discretion to choose his own commissioners. I then spoke with Jeff Wilson, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, and he related that some of the newer planners

felt intimidated and uncomfortable when they made their presentations before the MPC and had

to respond to many probing questions. I acknowledged that my training as a lawyer and my

rather precise manner of speaking might have seemed challenging to the newer planners, and I thanked him for the constructive criticism, saying that I wished I had received this input previously. I told him that I felt fully capable of being more sensitive to the way in which I framed my questions and that I would certainly keep his input in mind and adjust accordingly.

I called Supervisor Williams and reported that – in order to satisfy the complaints of the two commissioners – I would step aside as Chair for the coming year and make sure to amend my possibly intimidating manner when dealing with Planning Department staff. After checking with those other commissioners, Supervisor Williams reported that this was not an acceptable compromise to them; they were now demanding my resignation from the MPC as commissioner.

I have served with these two commissioners for 4-1/2 and 3-1/2 years respectively. I have been given no explanation as to why my immediate resignation from the MPC mid-term is now deemed necessary. There have been no specific charges leveled against me; if such reasons exist, I have had no opportunity to respond. If anyone is required to resign from the MPC, it should be the recently re-appointed commissioner who is calling for my removal. He is not a resident of Montecito, as is required by Section 2-26(b) and Section 2-26.2(b) of Ordinance No. 4468 that established the MPC. The remaining two commissioners – who form a quorum and a majority with me – have given me their support, both to remain an MPC member and to serve as Chair.

In our last phone conversation, Supervisor Williams made an off-hand reference to my absences from meetings, but – had he inquired – I would have explained that I missed several meeting for the first time this year due to the unexpected passing of a close family member, which made it necessary for me to be out of town on an urgent basis. However, my absences never deprived the MPC from having a quorum nor forced a continuation. Additionally there is no attendance requirement in the ordinance for continuing to serve on the MPC.

Ultimately, it appears that the principle motivation for Supervisor Williams to call for my removal is his reluctance to recruit two new commissioners rather than one, making it easier for him "...to facilitate a full complement of commissioners." He actually admitted to me in a phone conversation that he would have some difficulty finding two replacement commissioners. However, this concern seems in complete contrast to his other stated goal "to allow other individuals in the Montecito community to serve on the MPC." Moreover, even if I am removed, since there also is a commissioner who does not meet the ordinance residency requirement in Montecito to serve on the MPC, Supervisor Williams needs to remove him as well. So he is in the position of finding two new commissioners regardless of the outcome in my case.

I personally contributed to the establishment of the MPC. I have been appointed and reappointed to this entity by both Supervisor Carbajal and Supervisor Williams. I do not believe this removal request is motivated by valid reasons. On the contrary, I believe that what has transpired is detrimental to the established process of selecting and reappointing commissioners. It is unacceptable for commissioners to threaten and conspire against a fellow commissioner and for Supervisor Williams to condone and facilitate this behavior, which erodes the foundation of any County commission, constitutes a great disservice to the intent of County Code Sec. 2-26.5, and negatively reflects on the integrity of the Board of Supervisors.

Respectfully,

Susan Keller

Susan Keller, Montecito Planning Commissioner

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara

RE: A-27) Consider recommendations regarding the removal of Susan Keller from the Montecito Planning Commission

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